

The World of Women Hunts Me

WRITING AS A WOMAN: MYTHOLOGY, TIME, THE
WEAVING METAPHOR AND SYMBOLISM IN
EUDORA WELTY'S THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM, THE GOLDEN APPLES,
DELTA WEDDING, LOSING BATTLES, AND THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER

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Title: Writing as a Woman: Mythology, Time, the Weaving Metaphor, and Symbolism in Eudora Welty's The Robber Bridegroom, The Golden Apples, Delta Wedding, Losing Battles, and The Optimist's Daughter

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This dissertation is an attempt to further investigate Eudora Welty's feminine discourse, a discourse which is in constant dialogue with other women writers and happens to intersect with many of the issues raised by contemporary feminist theorists. Accordingly, Chapter One is an introduction in which Welty is aptly situated in the female traditions of writing and is found to have touched upon many feminine issues raised by later feminist theorists. Also, in this chapter four paradigms are delineated. Therefore, the discussion in the ensuing chapters is based on the emergent paradigms.

The first paradigm has to do with Welty's feminine appropriation of ancient myths and fairy tales; accordingly, the discussion in the second chapter focuses on Welty's appropriation of the myths and fairy tales in The Robber Bridegroom and The Golden Apples. In both texts, Welty's heroines refuse to play the victim role inherent in masculine narrative.

The second paradigm concerns Welty's concept of women's time; it is a concept which attaches women to monumental and cyclical temporality. Accordingly, Chapter Three focuses on Welty's distortion of man's time on two levels, the narrative and the historical in Delta Wedding.

The third paradigm is Welty's employment of the weaving metaphor in Losing Battles. Therefore, Chapter Four focuses on Welty's consistent employment of the weaving metaphor to stitch together many conflicting issues, such as the relation between the myth of the land and the history of people, the relationship between the individual and community, the concept of kinship versus the outsider, and the relationship between the masculine and feminine.

The fourth paradigm is Welty's idiosyncratic use of symbols and feminine images. This paradigm is the basis of discussion in Chapter Five, focusing on Welty's use of symbols and images in The Optimist's Daughter. All the symbols and images have been found to be related to the experiential domain of women; Welty has used them in order to enact a feminine consciousness that defies the patriarchal traditions of society.

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I want to dedicate this study to my parents, wife, and children, whom I left for two full years in order to accomplish this task.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that Eudora Welty resists any critical attempt to tie her or her works to any feminist agenda, her works are full of feminist issues. Welty, like many other twentieth century American women writers, creates a narrative discourse which is in opposition to the mainstream male discourse. Even though Welty dismisses the works of feminist theorists as “hilarious stuff,” she commits herself to the paradigms and the norms of feminine fiction where she enacts a feminine consciousness that constantly disrupts and challenges the stereotypes and the inherited assumptions of the masculine narrative. Accordingly, this study is based on the assumption that Welty is a female writer whose discourse is feminine, in the sense that it is constructed in accordance with the norms and the paradigms of feminine fiction. It is a discourse in line with the conventions of feminine discourse and happens to intersect with most of the issues raised by feminist theorists. In this respect, Welty’s discourse is stylistically patterned to convey the specificity of women’s experience. The stylistic patterns that are the subject of this study will include Welty’s feminine appropriation of patriarchal myths and legends, her feminine perception of time, her appropriation of the weaving metaphor, and her idiosyncratic use of symbols and images.

To set the scene for such a discussion, it is important to show how Welty is situated in the tradition of female writers, mainly Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Anne Porter. Then, it is necessary to go through the works of some feminists and show how Welty’s discourse coincides with the works of

some French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and other feminist theorists, mainly Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Hence, Welty's feminine paradigms will be delineated and exemplified in her fiction. The emergent paradigms will function as a springboard for the discussion in the ensuing chapters.

As mentioned above, Welty does not seem to show any interest in the women's movement or feminism because, as she repeatedly remarks, she does not feel that she was discriminated against. In an interview with Alice Walker, Welty states, "Being a woman has never kept me from writing or finding publication" (15). In another interview with Charles T. Bunting, when she was asked whether her fiction reflects a feminine point of view, Welty again dismisses any feminist agenda by claiming: "I am a woman. In writing fiction, I think imagination comes ahead of sex. A writer's got to be able to live inside all characters: male, female, old, young. To live inside any other person is to jump. Whether the other persons are male or female is subordinate" (58).ⁱ Such answers may reveal Welty's disbelief in the political motives of the women's movement and the assumptions of feminist criticism, but this does not necessarily mean that she is indifferent to issues of gender entrenched in the patriarchal society. On the contrary, Welty, throughout her works, shows much interest in the cause of women. In One Writer's Beginnings, Welty confirms that she is a woman writer whose sheltered life "can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts within" (104). It should be admitted, however, that Welty's vague and ambivalent remarks about feminism have dissuaded many critics from

approaching her fiction from a feminist perspective, but one should be reminded of Michael Kreyling's remarks about Welty's tactics of deflecting questions:

"Deflecting the right question is not atypical of Welty" (4).

In fact, Welty does not disavow feminism as a literary and critical movement, but she is against the political agenda of some feminists. She has frequently stressed that it is imagination and not sex that gains independence for any writer. In this sense, Welty repudiates the ideological agenda of feminism, yet she embraces an artistic one; Welty believes that the best expression of feminism is through the artistic creation of women writers. Women writers can promote feminism, not by slogans and radical rhetoric but rather by whatever they write. Therefore, it is the feminine artistry which can raise the issues about gender differences. In this sense, it is the feminine way of writing which dictates the feminist agenda. Welty, therefore, hails women artists such as Georgia O'Keefe and Martha Graham for the independent spirit they pursue in their arts. In this respect, Rebecca Marks argues that "Welty's art does not yield readily to the labels or demands of any political or critical agenda. Yet, in her answers she does not actually reject feminism but reaffirms it by returning to the independence and spirit at the core of political feminism" (13). In fact, this sense of independence has placed Welty in the female tradition where her predecessors as well as her contemporaries influence her.

Indeed, Welty writes within the tradition of women writers who concern themselves with women's issues in patriarchal societies; she is in line with women writers such as Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Anne Porter and

others. Therefore, it is not a surprise when Welty, in the same interview with Bunting, defends women writers by saying, "I think there have been not a few great women writers, of course Jane Austen. I don't see how anyone could have a greater scope in knowledge of human nature and reveal more of human nature than Austen. Consider Virginia Woolf. The Brontes" (59). Before drawing a comparison between Welty and any woman writer, it is very important to note that possible similarities should not be interpreted as a sign of weakness or lack of originality. On the contrary, Welty is an original writer who deals with gender issues in a unique style. It is true that some women writers have influenced her; yet, the concept of influence must not be understood as a synonym for imitation but rather a process of dialogue among writers. In this respect, Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept of dialogic discourse is relevant. In his "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin stresses the fact that prose writers, like poets, are in constant dialogue with each other and the image in the novel is like a word in a poem: once it is put in new surroundings it is "dialogized", and, in effect, it starts to acquire new meanings. (274) In this sense, Welty, like other women writers, touches upon gender issues, but her style, technique and meanings are as fresh as her fiction. There is no doubt that Welty is an admirer of Austen and she touches upon similar themes; yet, it should be acknowledged that each writer has a unique identity.

In fact, Welty and Austen are often compared because both of them led a life limited to their regions and neither of them showed much interest in the outside world. Like Austen, Welty is interested in the themes of womanhood,

love, marriage and family relationships. Therefore, some critics would classify her as a follower of Jane Austen, mainly because she concentrates on the internal much more than the external. Welty, in The Eye of the Story, reveals peculiar admiration for Austen; she hails her as a young woman writer. Welty writes “As all her work testifies, her time, her place, her location in society is in no more question than the fact that she was a woman. She wrote from a perfectly solid firm foundation, and her work is wholly affirmative” (6). Welty’s admiration of Austen culminates in a point of identification when she defends Austen against her detractors, those who accused her of being unknowledgeable of external events. Welty writes “She could be our Waterloo. She is our Waterloo” (6). In fact, Welty’s praise of Jane Austen is not only because of Austen’s wide knowledge of human nature but also for her comic scope and her boldness in criticizing the chivalric English middle class values.

In comparing Austen and Welty, Louise Westling sees that the two women have something in common regarding their lives and fiction. Westling describes the affinity between the two writers:

[Welty] is like her much admired predecessor Jane Austen in having spent most of her life modestly in one place, surrounded by family and friends. Her best work is no more limited by those circumstances than Austen’s, for both women view their world with a keen satiric gaze which allows them to transform it into a microcosm of the human comedy. (2-3)

Such an analogy is fair and gives some insight into the relationship between the two writers. Indeed, the comic aspect of Austen’s fiction is of strong appeal to

Welty, who sees in humor an effective means of criticizing the patriarchal society. In addition, Austen's recurrent themes of womanhood, in terms of love, sexual maturation, and marriage, are of a special interest to women in general and Welty in particular. However, in spite of the fact that Austen is a realist who is forced to write within the expectations and the conventions of her masculine society, she reveals increasing skepticism about the values of this society. In her different works, Austen is skeptical about the male definition of female sexuality and education. In "Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition," Lloyd W. Brown argues that Austen responds to issues raised about women by Mary Wollstonecraft in "A Vindication of the Rights of Women". According to Brown, Austen, in Persuasion, is critical of the education system that gives man the prerogative to tell his own story. In this respect, Brown affirms "she seems in her quiet way to be questioning the assumption that inequalities and differences in society and education are beyond reproach, regret, and redress" (323). In other novels such as Pride and Prejudice, Austen is bitterly critical of the 'sex seeker' image of women who want to achieve identity by conforming to the narrow sexual roles established for these women by the patriarchal society. She is also critical of the idea of the ideal woman, an ideal that is based on feminine tenderness. Taking this brief background into consideration, it is not then a surprise when we find Welty dealing with the same issues and concerns.

Welty, in The Robber Bridegroom, questions the validity of man's story of women. Accordingly, she has her female characters make up their own stories. Rosamond, for instance, asserts her identity by telling her own story, a story that

gives a new image different from that image of a woman encoded in the masculine narrative; Rosamond also rejects a marriage bond over which she has no control. She deliberately redefines herself by what she does; therefore, what happens in the narrative becomes her story. In Delta Wedding, Welty satirizes the Fairchilds' story of Robbie and her marriage to George; therefore, we find her insisting that Robbie give a new definition of her story and her relation with George. Welty is supportive of a marriage relationship which is based on love and equal capacities between the two sexes as is the case between Jack and Gloria in Losing Battles and Laurel Hand and Phil in The Optimist's Daughter. Welty, even though sympathetic, is critical of women who succumb to the claims of the patriarchal society. In The Golden Apples, she is dissatisfied with Miss Eckhart, who is totally obsessed with her music. However, she is supportive of women such as Cassie Morrison and Virgie Rainey, who challenge the claims of the masculine society in Morgana. In The Optimist's Daughter, she is equally critical of women such as Miss Adele and Miss Tennyson. These women are blamed for their resignation to a false chivalric world. However, even though Welty seems to be critical of Fay for her selfishness, she seems to admire her boldness in challenging the chivalric values of Mount Salus. It is not a surprise that Fay's boldness becomes an important factor in having Laurel reassess her relationship with the past.

In the light of such a brief comparison, one would not hesitate to confirm that Welty, like her much admired predecessor, is concerned about the position of women in a masculine society. It should be admitted, however, that the style

of the two writers is different: While Austen is a realistⁱⁱ, Welty is a modernist who is in line with James Joyce and Faulkner in general and Virginia Woolf in particular. In Austen's works, the protagonists and the implied reader are always male characters whose masculinity is usually confirmed by their subjugation of the female heroines through romantic love. Austen's narrative discourse is also male oriented in terms of its concordant syntax and highly polished and formal register; it is a style which always presupposes a masculine linearity. However, if we look at Eudora Welty's works, we find that Welty is much more in the fashion of Woolf. She is a modernist writer whose works are subversive in style and discourse, and she seldom follows a chronological order of narration, nor does she sustain an easily perceptible chain of incidents. In this sense, one can confirm that Welty is a feminist modernist whose works deal with feminist issues in a subversive style. In this sense, her discourse has different priorities from that of the male modernists.

Furthermore, Welty's heroes and heroines are not in line with the traditional conventions. In this respect, Westling affirms that the heroic behavior in Welty's fiction is no longer male oriented, but rather it hits a substratum of various male and female roles. Westling says

Instead of the traditional pattern of individual male subjectivity with its demands for self-definition, and domination, Welty pictures the masculine hero from the outside. Repeatedly she presents a beloved male observed and indulged by a whole family, especially by its women. He embodies a

kind of joyous phallic energy but is ultimately vulnerable and dependent upon his connection with women. (32)

In Delta Wedding, George is seen by most of the women as the hero of the Fairchilds; however, he is not empowered as a man until he separates from the collectiveness of the family and is reconciled to his wife Robbie. Similarly, Jack in Losing Battles does not realize himself as an independent individual and claim his own identity without the help of his wife Gloria. In The Robber Bridegroom, Jamie Lockhart's identity is confused, and it is not confirmed without the relentless pursuit of his wife Rosamond. King MacLain in The Golden Apples has lost his real presence because of his indifference to his wife, Snowdie. In this sense, Welty's portrayal of male characters is closer to that of Woolf than Austen.

The impact of Woolf on Welty is further evidence that the latter is in the tradition of women writers. In fact, Welty is also a great admirer of Virginia Woolf, and it is not a surprise that many of her works resonate with those of Woolf. Welty's The Robber Bridegroom, for instance, shares with Woolf's Orlando many thematic concerns and even stylistic techniques. Both works deal with the identity of the female heroines in masculine societies. Suzan Harrison confirms that the linkage between the two novels is intimate:

Both Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty are concerned as well in these two novels with the identity of a woman. Woolf's *Orlando* is very obviously a novel about gender and self-definition. She examines the masculine and the feminine elements in both the culture and the individual and the

significance of gender in the construction of identity. [...] Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* responds to many of the issues of *Orlando*. (59)

It should be acknowledged, however, that Welty's style is much more subtle than Woolf's. Even though the masculine world in *The Robber Bridegroom* is hidden, it is much more domineering and oppressive than that of *Orlando*. Welty is much more subtly adroit in handling the theme of women's identity; her women are much more assertive in their pursuit to achieve their own identities. Salome and Rosamond have to fight very hard in order to redefine themselves by constructing their own stories, stories that are in opposition to the masculine ones. On one hand, Salome's strong desire to dominate her husband is an attempt, on her part, to attain power. By doing so, she can enter the masculine world and, in effect, redefine the position of women in such a masculine society. On the other hand, Rosamond is not afraid of this masculine society; she is even stubborn in her intent to shake off the masculine claims of this society, not by avoiding it, but rather by seeking it.

Concerning her portrayal of characters, Welty, as mentioned above, is closer to Woolf. King MacLain in *The Golden Apples* is a threatening sexual power as is the case with Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*; he is a man of power and sexuality. MacLain's portrayal is compatible with that of Mr. Ramsay. In spite of MacLain's complete lack of obvious sexuality, he conveys the novel's main sexual charge; MacLain represents the masculine principle of vengeful authority. Again Like Mr. Ramsay, MacLain's absence from Morgana is as threatening as his presence. Also in *Delta Wedding*, even though George

represents the patriarchal authority in Shellmound, he is easily contained by the women of the Faichilds; he is always surrounded by them, and we see him only through their eyes.

Another example of the dialogue between Welty and Woolf is the relationship between Welty's Losing Battles and Woolf's The Waves. The two works, according to Harrison, share certain stylistic devices as well as thematic concerns. Both writers make use of light images, lyrical strains and the manipulation of the epic tradition. In The Waves, Woolf uses light images to illuminate the internal side of her characters, and in Losing Battles, light images are used to foreshadow the abstract values negotiated at the reunion. Harrison confirms the similarity between the two texts in terms of manipulating light images. She affirms that "Nowhere in Virginia's Woolf's fiction does light play as significant a role as in her novel *The Waves*. [...] And nowhere in Welty's fiction is light as important as it is in *Losing Battles*" (82). In fact, each of the two novels opens with a lyrical strain in which light images foreshadow the psyche and the different attitudes of the characters. The Waves begins with the sun just rising and spreading its rays on the trees in the garden. Similarly, Losing Battles begins with the rooster crowing to usher the advent of the morning light; it is the light which, according to Welty, will show the characters without any masks. The two writers also use poetic images, figures of speech such as similes and metaphors, in order to suggest the internal, as is the case in Woolf. In Welty, however, such tropes are used to suggest the external. Woolf believes that it is important for the novel writer to saturate the prose with poetic images in order to

make the external suggest the internal. For instance, in The Waves, the physical description of the restaurant is a representation of Neville's anxiety while she is waiting for Percival. However, in Losing Battles, Welty uses the poetic images to suggest the troubles and the disasters the three families might face if they keep clinging to the values of the decaying past (Harrison 84).

This past is further questioned by the two writers by drawing on epic tradition. It is the epic past which Bakhtin describes as "valorized past of beginnings and peak times [...] is distanced, finished and closed like a circle" (10). However, it should be noted that the reference to this epic tradition goes beyond the mere questioning of the past; it deals with many issues such as separateness and reunion, interdependence and independence, and the quest for identity. In The Waves, there is a struggle between the need for unity and the desire for separateness. Rhoda wants to be part of the union, yet she is happy when she is alone. As a woman, separation for her is necessary; she is in need of independence and self-definition. Similarly, in Losing Battles, the quest for identity and independence is central. Julia Mortimer, Judge Moody, and Gloria stand for the individual voices that call for such separation, separation which is an essential step towards independence. Gloria, however, is the most explicit in her wish to separate Jack from the reunion; she also wants to separate herself and Lady May from the reunion: "I am going to take Jack and Lady May and we are going to clear away from everybody, move to ourselves" (320).

Welty is not only in dialogue with her women predecessors but with her contemporaries as well. Westling discusses the ways in which Eudora Welty,

Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connorⁱⁱⁱ draw on women's heritage; she sees the three women as: "the inheritors of a tradition of women's writing in the South which originated in letters, diaries, and oral histories" (2). These women had to deal with a past which had been contradictory towards women; women were considered to be as sacred as the land, yet they were abused in the same way the land was. Westling argues that even though these three women follow different approaches to inscribe their feminine identity, they all share the same interest in the feminine point of view and the question of the female identity. While Welty celebrates womankind, McCullers and O'Connor "struggle against it" (5). Such an observation is interesting, because Welty, in all her works, reveals a feminine consciousness that reflects women's power in resisting the claims of the masculine society.

In Welty, female characters are formidable and relentless in their struggle against the claims of the masculine society. Laurel Hand in The Optimist's Daughter, Laura in Delta Wedding, Rosamond in The Robber Bridegroom, Virgie in The Golden Apples, and Gloria in Losing Battles are all powerful in their opposition to the past; they are also adamant in their pursuit of identity. What is more interesting, however, is the fact that some of Welty's defeated female characters manifest exceptional efforts in their struggle against the masculine society. Miss Eckhart in "June Recital," Miss Julia in Losing Battles, Salome in The Robber Bridegroom and Fay in The Optimist's Daughter are never powerless or desperate in their struggle. However, in McCullers' and O'Connor's fiction, female characters are often defeated and they stress their femininity by

avoiding it; daughters do not want to identify with their mothers because the attitude of society towards mothers is negative. These female characters are defeated because they can not escape the sense of entrapment (5). Despite the differences between Welty on one side, and McCullers and O'Connor on the other, they are all situated in the female tradition. In this respect, Westling sees the three women as partakers of the same heritage. She also argues that the three women were influenced by Porter; therefore, she affirms that they could not have achieved their own voice without the support of other women writers such as Porter (63). Indeed, Porter has influenced the three women, but her impact on Welty is particularly great.

Porter and Welty were close friends and each of them admired the work of the other. In her introduction to Welty's "Curtain of Green," Porter praises Welty for her political disinterestedness. In this sense, we discover that Welty's attitude towards politics has been influenced by Porter because the latter believes that good art should be separated from the world of politics. Moreover, Welty's attitude towards feminism must have been influenced by Porter who, in turn, disavows feminism. Surprisingly, Porter's works, as is the case in Welty, reveal many feminine concerns. In this regard, Will Brantly comments on Porter's works by asserting that "Porter may have disclaimed the feminist label but what she presents is in essence a feminist critique of a world in which women, even when they refuse to cooperate with their oppressors, are still often stupefied by their lack of power" (181). Indeed Porter's female heroines are as powerless as those of McCullers and O'Connor. These characters can not escape the subordinate

status assigned to women by the patriarchal society. Speaking about Porter's defeated heroines, Brantley argues

Porter's heroes are not men, but women like Granny Weatherall whose life has been blighted by her rage and sense of powerlessness at having been jilted or Sophia Rhea whose sense of herself as a commanding matriarch does not deflect the reader's awareness of her subordinate status in the Southern patriarchal order. (181)

Therefore, one can confirm that even though Porter tries to disavow feminism, her works are concerned with feminist issues and her influence on Welty can not be ignored. Welty herself admits Porter's influence on her. In her essay, "Katherine Anne Porter: The Eye of the Story," Welty shows special admiration of Porter's style. She states that "[a]s her work has done in many other respects, it has shown me a thing or two about the eye of fiction's visibility and invisibility, about its clarity and its radiance" (31). Moreover, Welty praises Porter's stories because she stresses the interior by the intensity of the surface. There is no surprise, then, to find that the same remark is made by Louis D. Rubin in his essay, "Everything Is Brought out in the Open: Eudora Welty's Losing Battles." Rubin argues that Welty's "fiction does not lie on the surface, and the surface is anything but superficial. Yet, paradoxically everything is contained there in the surface" (197).

Porter is interested in classical female heroines such as the historical figure of Joan of Arc, a figure of a woman who is a victim of a predetermined verdict; she is interested in such a figure because of the feminine courage and

sense of independence the heroine manifests in her ordeal. Likewise, Welty is attracted to classical female heroines such as Circe, Medusa, Leda, and others. In fact, Welty's recourse to classical allusions is an effective technique of questioning the masculine traditions which have been deeply rooted in history and classical mythology. In addition, Welty, like Porter, does not want to stick to the traditional boundaries of fiction; she is as experimental as Porter in writing what critics call "cross genre." In this regard and according to Darlene Unrue, Porter's Ship of Fools and Welty's Losing Battles are two novels in which the writers manipulate dramatic discourse to serve as a narrative technique (97).

Porter and Welty indicate their feminine creativity by adopting the modernist technique of piecing together disparate and conflicting fragments in order to create a mosaic of harmony. They seem to indicate women's skills of creating a tapestry out of unrelated fragments. In comparing Ship of Fools and Losing Battles, Unrue cites both Porter and Welty respectively, each defending the structure and the texture of her novel. Porter explains to Barbra Thompson that

A novel [...] is really like a symphony [...] where instrument after instrument has to come in at its own time and no other. [. . .] It needed a book to contain its full movement of the sea, and the ship on the sea, and the people going around the deck. The whole movement felt as forward motion. (96)

Welty, in turn, tells Charles T. Bunting that her novel is a process like that which is described by Porter. Welty explains, "In a novel you have time to subordinate

characters, graduation of moods, subsidiary plots, and other things that complement the story or oppose it. The difference is much more than a matter of length—it is a matter of organization” (96). Such remarks by Porter and Welty reveal that they write in the spirit of modernism, yet the role of the artist in such a process of writing is stressed throughout the act of organization which assumes the freedom of the writer; it is the freedom which women writers were denied in the past. Unrue argues that the two writers show their dissatisfaction with the realist tradition because the writer does not enjoy much freedom. She affirms that the two writers “insisted on art’s freedom from prevailing definitions of realism and genre and also on the artist’s necessary role as the creator of new perceptions of order, the illuminator of meaning” (79). Furthermore, the fact that the two writers stress the artistic quality, in terms of the timelessness of their art as opposed to history and the chronological order of masculine fiction, is an indication of their feminist tactic to disrupt the linearity of the masculine narrative.

Unrue goes on to argue that the two novels have many similarities with respect to theme and the appropriation of the “Homeric similes.” What is interesting, however, is the fact that the two novels are centered on the theme of a quest which is a prerequisite for identity verification. In this respect, Porter’s allusion to the *Odyssey*’s ten year voyage is a journey or a quest for identity, a quest which has often concerned Porter. Similarly, Welty in Losing Battles makes an allusion to both the Iliad and the Odyssey. Jack’s circular movement to and away from the reunion is parallel to the circular movement of the tragic hero of the Odyssey. Moreover, Losing Battles resonates with the Iliad in relation

to conflicts, the feelings of anger and pride, and the final sense of reconciliation (Unrue 99-100). In fact, Welty in this novel demonstrates her artistry throughout the final harmony maintained at the end. She reconciles many conflicting issues: individual and community, the living and the dead, and the history of the family and the history of the land; all these are brought into a mosaic of social and political harmony, the harmony which is the main concern of women who are involved in handy crafts. In this regard, one can confirm that in Losing Battles Welty manipulates the weaving in piecing together, and in a very artistic manner, the disparate elements of the world Losing Battles. Welty employs the weaving metaphor in a very successful manner; it is a metaphor which is recurrent in the female tradition as an indication of feminine creativity.

Welty, therefore, is a female writer whose works position her firmly in the female tradition. She is in line with women writers, both her predecessors and her contemporaries. Like them, she touches upon issues of gender and themes of womanhood. In this sense, Welty's fiction, as has been shown above, shares with women writers their concerns about the position and the image of women in patriarchal societies. Her fiction reveals a defiant feminine consciousness, a consciousness which does not want to give in to the oppression and the restriction of the masculine society. Her heroines struggle very hard to define themselves and achieve their own identity.

At this juncture, it is important to note that Welty is not only a woman writer whose works situate her in the female tradition, but also a writer who, most surprisingly, anticipates many issues raised by feminist critics. Her discourse

happens to intersect with the works of most of these critics. Indeed, one of the reasons why Welty has dismissed feminism is the fact that feminists were at odds with each other; therefore, they never gave a clear-cut definition of feminism. The feminist critics, according to Elaine Showalter, fall into more than one faction: the revisionists, the gynocritics, the linguistic feminists, the psychoanalysts, and the cultural feminists. The revisionists, or the androcentric critics, are those who have raised awareness about the issues of gender representation in phallogentric fiction. The gynocritics assume that women's discourse should be in opposition to the masculine narrative, in that it should stress the body of women as a metaphor for their creativity. The linguistic feminists believe that language is gendered and women are dismissed as hesitant, uncertain, and repetitive. The psychoanalytic feminists focus on the psychic differences because they assume, women's discourse is shaped by the body and the socialization of the sex roles. Finally, the cultural feminists acknowledge that there are differences between men's and women's writing in terms of class, gender, history, and nationality. As mentioned above, Welty's narrative discourse seems to coincide with most of the issues raised by these feminists. Yet, for the sake of focus, it is very important to show how Welty's discourse happens to intersect with particular feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Julia Kristeva.

Irigaray is one of the feminist critics who raises the issues of representation in masculine narrative. In "The Sex Which Is not One," she reveals how the concepts of the 'male gaze' and the 'specular economy' were instituted by

Western philosophy. She shows how this philosophy prescribed the standard of beauty, the standard by which women have been objectified as sexual objects. Therefore, Irigaray in "Politics of Women" urges women writers to undo the masculine discourse, to undo the repression of women and the restrictions imposed on them. She calls upon women writers to dislodge the sexual differences at the textual level. Women have to use men's language because this language is not a prerogative for men only. Mary Jacobus comments on Irigaray's strategy of appropriating language:

The 'work of language' which she envisages would undo representation altogether, even to the extent of refusing the linearity of reading. [...], the retroactive of a word ending, opens up the structure of language to reveal the repression on which meaning depends; and repression is the place of the feminine. (39)

According to Irigaray, this new mood of presentation should be effected in a subtle style, a style that foregrounds the "tactile," the "simultaneous and fluid" rather than the fixed. However, this style should not be linear and straightforward but rather discursive, and most important, it should not stress the duality of feminine/masculine or subject/object; otherwise, women will be repressed by the same discourse which has oppressed them for so long. Jacobus quotes Irigaray asserting the right of women for self-representation:

To play with mimesis, is therefore, for a woman, to attempt to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse; without letting herself be simply reduced to it [...] to ideas notably about her, elaborated in/by a masculine

logic, but in order to make visible by an effect of playful repetition, what should have remained hidden, the recovery of a possible operation of the feminine language. (40)

Scrutinizing Welty's fiction makes us believe that she unconsciously embraces a new mode of representation like that called for by Irigaray. In fact, Welty deliberately subverts the masculine narrative in many ways. First, she is in defiance of the specular system stipulated by the masculine society. Second, her narrative, as argued by Franzisca Gygax, is matrilinear rather than patrilinear (97). Third, the point of view in most of her works is feminine. Fourth, the role of the female heroines is stressed at the expense of male characters. Last, the language is skillfully manipulated to serve feminine themes and attitudes. In The Optimist's Daughter, for instance, the specular system is displaced by the recurrent reference to distorted vision. Instead, tactile senses and images are foregrounded. The several references to "hands" are indications of the value of the sensory system as opposed to the specular one. Also, in The Golden Apples, there is a shift in the narrative from Loch's masculine telescopic vision to Cassie's internal vision. In The Robber Bridegroom, the image of the naïve girl of the fairy tale is replaced by a girl who is beautiful but skillful at telling lies. In Delta Wedding, as is the case in the other works of Welty, the point of view is feminine. Laura, like Laurel, enters the scene as an outsider, yet she is gradually involved in the narrative until she becomes the most reliable point of view. It is also worth mentioning that Welty's heroines are empowered by their imagination which is inherited from their mothers. These heroines are not the objectified

other, but rather the enabling and the energetic subjects who help men to verify a confused identity. Rosamond succeeds in helping Jamie Lockhart by making him attain his identity. Similarly, in Losing Battles, Gloria succeeds in gaining independence for the semi-mythical hero of the Renfros and the Beechams. Also, Robbie, in Delta Wedding, saves George from the grip of the Fairchilds.

Pertaining to language and style, Welty's style of merging realism with magic, mythology with history, comic with epic, and fairy tales with local legend, is a strategy which gives a unique yet universal dimension to her fiction, and, in effect, gives a general perspective regarding gender issues in masculine society. Moreover, her appropriation of some classical myths is original in a sense; she stresses the feminine presence which was deliberately marginalized in some classical myths.^{iv} With regard to language, Welty successfully appropriates man's language to stress the strong presence of the feminine. For instance, most of the symbols used in her fiction have to do with women's experience. Symbols such as trapped birds, flowers, water, quilts, rings, circles, and others are relevant to the experiential domain of women. The reversal of the pastoral conventions in Delta Wedding is a significant stylistic feature which helps to shift the focus from the outside to Laura's awareness of the Fairchilds. The use of monologue as in the case of The Golden Apples is an effective technique whereby she exteriorizes the internal of her female character. Welty also skillfully uses the "märchen language" in order to create a sense of enchantment which places the narration in a timeless time. One can, therefore, confirm that Welty's fiction constantly disrupts and undoes the claims of the masculine

narrative. It is a disruption which can be further illuminated by the critical works of both Sandra Gilbert and Suzan Gubar.

In fact, the works of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar give much insight into the ways women writers have tried to resist the phallic tradition embedded in masculine narrative. In their joint work, The Mad Woman in the Attic, they show how nineteenth-century women writers followed different strategies in order to deal with the anxiety of authorship. Gubar's "The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity" reveals how a woman in Western culture has been perceived as an art object created by the male writer. Gubar argues that "woman is not simply an object [...] she is an art object: she is the ivory carving or mud replica, an icon or doll, but she is not the sculptor" (74). This attitude toward women is deeply rooted in Western culture and Christianity. Literary men, through different metaphors, have associated themselves with God, the Creator and the Author. Writers such as Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and others have portrayed the male artist as a progenitor or creator.^v As mentioned above, in this process of man's activity, woman is the product. Sometimes, however, and according to Gubar, she is the blank page on which man writes his own text. She is even the text which gives man pleasure to write and read. This created object has no name, no identity.

Looking at Welty's works in the light of the observations made by Gilbert and Gubar, one tends to believe that Welty is ahead of feminism because her works are full of issues similar to those raised by Gilbert and Gubar. Most of Welty's heroines defy the masculine claims of society with respect to the

definition of women. It is significant that most of Welty's heroines have certain artistic skills. With these skills, the female heroines try to create their own stories in order to redefine themselves. For instance, Rosamond in The Robber Bridegroom possesses the skill of storytelling; her lies indicate her desire to redefine herself in opposition to the masculine definition of a woman.

Rosamond's lies are as valuable as precious treasure: "The lies would simply fall out like diamonds and pearls" (39). Similarly, Laura McRaven in Delta Wedding resists the Fairchilds' perceptions of her; her sketches and drawings stand for her attempts to redefine herself. Virgie, in The Golden Apples, is a talented student of music. After her mother's funeral, we understand that it is her connection with Miss Eckhart, the music teacher, that makes her see differently. In associating herself with Beethoven and the dragon's blood, Virgie frees herself from the false and illusive reality of the world of Morgana and, in effect, defines herself as the rebellious woman of the future. Laurel Hand in The Optimist's Daughter is also an artist; she is a fabric designer. Her artistic profession enables her to redefine herself in terms of freedom and independence; she is different from the other women of Mount Salus.

Welty's works also intersect with the critical assumptions of Helene Cixous, a renowned French gynocritic. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous calls for women to go beyond the issue of equal rights; she urges them to overthrow the phallogocentric traditions that have suppressed women and made them fall into the category of "the other". Cixous believes that the history of reason, the masculine order, and language muted women and robbed them of

their identity. According to Cixous, the only way for a woman to overcome such an order is to write herself by inscribing her body; she urges women writers “write yourself, your body must be heard” (312). Cixous finds it impossible for women to escape the phallic tradition by resorting to the feminine libido. She believes that bisexuality is a prerogative of either of the two sexes; therefore, women writers can use men’s language in their own way. Woman has the freedom to write and discover the “Dark Continent.”

Cixous’s argument might apply to most of Welty’s works. For example, in The Optimist’s Daughter, we observe Welty using bodily language; the hands of women are stressed as a symbol of women’s creativity, as is the case with Laurel. Fay, in turn, succeeds in penetrating the patriarchal society of Mount Salus by the power of her body and sexuality. In The Robber Bridegroom, the body of woman is also a means of survival; Rosamond does not care to go home as naked as “the jay bird” as long as she is saved from the bandit. In “Moon Lake,” we observe the girls being not afraid of the sun and water; these, according to Rebecca Marks, are symbols of “masculine sexuality.” Therefore, Easter, with a knife in her hand, leads the other girls to the spring. Nina follows with a cup in her hand. Marks comments on this scene “The fact that between them, they possess both the traditional feminine cup and the traditional masculine knife indicates they must have both the phallus and clitoris in order to become women, in order to develop into sexually powerful women” (120).

Another example of the relevance of the female body in defining the feminine identity is in Welty’s short story “Livvie.” The value of the feminine body

is stressed by its metaphoric power of regeneration and rebirth. In Delta Wedding, the female body is also perceived as a factor of regeneration and fertility. In “Food, Landscape and the Feminine in Delta Wedding,” Westling argues that food rituals are linked with the female body; the ritual of combining the ingredients for Ellen’s cake is linked to the particularly erotic landscape that stands for the sexual union of George and Robbie. It is the same union which regains Robbie her place. Similarly, in Losing Battles, Gloria’s sexual act is necessary for the process of rebirth in which the identity of women is reaffirmed. By stressing the importance of the female body, Welty seems to oppose some classical myths which view man as having the feminine and the masculine, the two elements necessary for rebirth. Therefore, one can confirm that Welty has anticipated Cixous in stressing the importance of the female body.

Julia Kristeva is another French feminist whose work intersects with Welty’s. In “Women’s Time” Kristeva reveals how women are associated with space as opposed to linear or historical time; it is a space which is linked with the regeneration of species and the matriarchal reappearance in religions and mythology. Kristeva notes that women’s negative attitude towards historical time is due to the history of their oppression. Therefore, she argues that women’s time is monumental or cyclical. Kristeva contends

[a]s for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repletion and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization.

[. . .] There are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnamable *jouissance*. (473-74)

Kristeva goes on to differentiate between masculine and feminine time. Man's time is based in logical and ontological values, the values that have caused much anguish to women. Women's time, however, is based on intuition and dreams. In fact, Kristeva's theory of time has influenced Alice Jardine who, in turn, calls upon women to rethink the relationship between time and space. She asks them to rethink the crisis of the masculine narrative which is never gender neutral. This narrative defines man in terms of historical time and women in terms of space; however, this space is portrayed as the place of the unidentified "other."

If we look at the concept of time in Welty's fiction, we find that man's time is being distorted in many ways. First, the chronological order of father's time is repudiated, and instead, there is recourse to memory which places the narrative in timeless time. Second, the female "monumental or anterior" time relocates the oppressive masculine time. Third, the eternal matriarchal time replaces historical time. Last, feminine time is cyclical as opposed to linear masculine time; the female cyclic time is foregrounded by being associated with mythical time.

Most of the time distortion techniques that are summarized above are used by Welty in order to disrupt the linearity of the "father's time" and, in effect, question its oppressive nature. In The Golden Apples, for instance, all the events

are revealed through the memory of the female characters; it is through the memory of female characters such as Virgie, Katie, Cassie and Snowdie that we know what happens in each story. Similarly, in The Optimist's Daughter, the central incidents are revealed through the memory of Laurel. We know about the relationship between Becky and Judge McKelva only when Laurel remembers their lives together. This act of remembering follows no sequential order as would be the case in conventional masculine narrative. Also in Delta Wedding, the narrative unfolds when Laura starts remembering her trip to Shellmound. Through her act of remembering we have insight into the life of her mother and the lives of the Fairchilds.

As for monumental time, we find that most of Welty's protagonists have their eyes fixed on the future. It is not a surprise that most of Welty's female heroines are adamant in their resistance to the past; they are also skeptical of the present, yet intuitively maintain hope in the promise of the future. At the end of "The Wonderers," the final story in The Golden Apples, we see Virgie relentless in her decision to leave the past behind and look forward to the future. The past for Virgie is as crippling as it has been to her mother and to the other women in Morgana. Virgie's tears and the drops of the virgin rain are signs of new life, signs of freedom and rebirth. Laurel also, in The Optimist's Daughter, decides to leave behind the rigid past and concentrate on her future life. When she discovers how the past was false and restrictive to her mother, she makes up her mind to leave Mount Salus and go to Chicago to pursue a life of freedom, independence, and creativity. In Losing Battles, Gloria, who is fully conscious of

the atrocities of the past, decides to take Jack and her daughter and keep away from the reunion. She believes that the future holds for her and her family all the potentialities of free and independent life. In Delta Wedding, even though Shelly has some misgivings towards the future, she believes that this future will liberate her from the narrowly restrictive life of the Fairchilds. So, for all these women, monumental time is a means of salvation and a beginning of new life which asserts the Self and stresses women's capacity for creativity.

Concerning the eternal matriarchal time in Welty's fiction, there are many examples that make us believe that Welty's works do intersect with Kristeva's concept of female time as eternal. In fact the recurrent reappearance of the mother figure contributes to reinforcing the eternal mother's time. The reappearance of the mother figure has also to do with the sense of rebirth and regeneration the daughters experience. Most of Welty's female protagonists are associated with Persephone, the goddess of fertility in Greek mythology. In this sense, the reappearance of the mother figure reminds us of other mythical characters such as Demeter, Hecate and the triple goddess, a figure that represents the three stages in woman's life. The reappearance of this mother figure often takes the shape of mothers suffering and complaining about the injustice of masculine society. In this sense, the suffering of mothers is portrayed as a means of resurrection for their daughters. In Delta Wedding, for instance, the reappearance of Laura's mother helps her to shape her independent identity and enables her to be an element of change in Shellmound. Unlike the Fairchilds, Laura's consciousness of time is not limited to only a specific segment

but rather to the whole span of time in its totality and integrity. She is aware of the atrocities of the past, the uncertainty of the present and the promise of the future. So time for her is an eternal circle in which the reappearance of the mother figures connects what seems to be disconnected. In The Golden Apples, Virgie's sense of rebirth and renewal is maintained through her connection with the mother figure. In fact Virgie's rebirth is connected to the reappearance of two mother figures, the literal and the figurative. Through her connection with her literal mother, Katie Rainey, she becomes fully aware of the repressive nature of the past; through her connection with her figurative mother, Miss Eckhart, the music teacher, she has the possibility of redemption via her artistic skill. This double connection with the mother figure brings to mind the myth of Demeter and Hecate trying to help Persephone come back to earth in order to trigger rebirth and spread fertility. Again, this connection is intended to show that the mothers' presence is not limited to the temporality of man's time.

At this point it is important to reiterate that Welty is a female writer whose works situate her aptly in the female tradition. Moreover, her works surprisingly happen to intersect with most of the issues raised by the feminist critics. Therefore, it is not surprising that many critics have recently started to approach Welty from a feminist perspective. In fact, it is Louis D. Rubin who has first drawn attention to Welty's feminine style. Rubin, however, does not use the term "feminine" as an exclusive epithet of women's writing; for him, male writers can write a feminine form of fiction. Rubin describes Welty's style as "[e]ntirely feminine, it moves lightly, capriciously, mirroring the bemused, diverted quality of

the people whom it describes. [. . .] But if it is feminine, it is also quite muscular, and its elusive, hovering quality is never vague or soft. Her art is highly complex, precise, and controlled” (133-34).

However, it is Peggy Prenshaw who first seriously considers Welty as a feminist writer. In her article “Woman’s World, Man’s Place: The Fiction of Eudora Welty,” Prenshaw demonstrates that the matriarchal world in Welty’s fiction is foregrounded by its dominance because this recurrent matriarchal world is central to Welty’s fiction. In another study conducted by Julia Demmin and Daniel Curley, they discuss the mythological motifs in Welty’s The Golden Apples. Demmin and Curley have shown how Welty’s narrative discourse marks a kind of transition from male creativity into female magical power. Louise Westling has also contributed to the feminist study of Welty’s fiction. In her book on three women writers, Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O’Connor, Westling stresses the bond between Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf; she affirms that Welty, like Woolf, concentrates on the themes of womanhood. In another study, Westling shows how Welty reverses the masculine narrative and the fragmented points of view and, instead, consistently focuses on women’s points of view. Another recent feminist study of Welty’s fiction is that of Patricia Yaeger. She focuses on Welty’s appropriation of the masculine tradition. Yaeger’s main argument is that a woman writer usually uses male language to express her ideas and views. Also, in her study of the feminist intertextuality in Eudora Welty’s The Golden Apples, Rebecca Marks argues that the various allusions to male writers create a kind of textuality that refutes the masculine

assumptions of those writers. The most comprehensive and recent feminist study of Welty is that of Franziska Gygax. In Serious Darings from within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels, Gygax concentrates on the narrative devices that are indicative of female writing; she points out how Welty effects a kind of dissent from the dominant masculine traditions of narrative.

Some other critics, both male and female, have conducted critical studies of Welty's fiction and given additional insight into Welty's feminist perspectives. For instance, Reynolds Price, in his article, "The Onlooker Smiling: An Early Reading of The Optimist's Daughter," discusses the ways in which female heroines, such as Laurel, start as passive observers and end up as active participants with an alternative point of view. In "The Other Way to View Gender and Selfhood in Delta Wedding and The Golden Apples," Suzan Harrison argues that, in these works, Welty follows a narrative technique which depends on the subversion of perspectives; the feminist perspective is foregrounded while the masculine is left on the periphery. In her study, Eudora Welty: Two Pictures at Once in Her Frame, Barbara Harrell Carson argues that Welty resists the hierarchal system established by Western Metaphysics, and so she refuses to have a vision built on the mere reconciliation of binary opposites such as feminine/ masculine.

Keeping in mind all the elements previously discussed, it seems fair to confirm that Welty's feminine discourse is a kind of dialogue. Welty is a female writer whose discourse is feminine in a sense that it is inscribed in a manner

which opposes the masculine discourse. This discourse is a kind of dialogue among variant discourses: autobiographical, cultural, experiential, social, political, and theoretical. In this respect, one can easily delineate the paradigms on which Welty's feminine discourse is constructed. These paradigms have to do with Welty's thematic and stylistic concerns, the manner in which Welty patterns her fiction to fit with the specificity of women's experience. For the sake of focus, only four important paradigms will be illustrated below. These paradigms constitute the main features of Welty's feminine discourse and, in effect, will be the guidelines for the discussion in the ensuing chapters.

The first paradigm, which will be the focus of Chapter Two, is Welty's recurrent feminine appropriation of mythology and fairy tale motifs. Welty, who seems to be fully aware of the masculine claims inherent in some classical myths and fairy tales, persistently disrupts and critiques the heroic quest of the male hero. In contrast, she insists on the vital role of women in any heroic quest. Welty is also critical of the belief that male gods and heroes are capable of regeneration because they embody both the feminine and the masculine; she is critical of the Zeus figure being both the male god and the nymph. Welty is dissatisfied with fairy tales because these are written from a male perspective; it is a perspective which always subsumes women and considers them naïve and easily subjugated to the desires of the male hero. Welty, instead, shows female characters who are stubborn in their willingness to identify themselves in a way different from man's definition of the fairy tale heroine.

In almost all of her works, Welty makes reference to myths such as Perseus and Medusa, Psyche and Cupid and Persephone and Demeter. In Welty, the Medusa figure is no longer a monster but a woman with an artistic skill, a skill which indicates the creative power of women. So, Medusa is no longer a figure to be ravaged by Perseus, the male hero. On the contrary, she is a woman who can survive death by her creativity. Therefore, it is not strange that we find female heroines such as Laurel, Laura, Rosamond, and Gloria representing the Medusa figure that is not afraid of the phallic power of Perseus. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is another recurrent example whereby Welty stresses the central role of women in any process of rebirth. Female heroines such as Rosamond, Laura, and Gloria are always at the center of the circle, and they are always an important factor in helping man attain his identity. Similarly, the myth of Persephone and Demeter is used by Welty in order to stress the role of women in any regenerative process. In Welty's stories and novels, the Persephone figure is represented by powerful women who are also aided by the feminine Dionysian figures in order to bring about rebirth and fertility in society. Examples of these figures are Laurel in The Optimist's Daughter, Ellen's daughters in Delta Wedding, Virgie in The Golden Apples, Gloria and Julia in Losing Battles and Livvie in "Livvie."

Welty also appropriates fairy tales in a way that reveals her feminist agenda. She deliberately subverts the masculine assumptions that are inherent in tales such as "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Rapunzel," and other fairy tales from the Grimms. Welty skillfully subverts the masculine plots of such tales; it is the

plot which portrays the female heroine as naïve and helpless. This heroine always seeks a royal marriage because this will provide her with protection and, in turn, avoids the wickedness of the stepmother. Welty reverses such plots, and instead of having a naïve heroine, we have a heroine who is confident in herself and her ability to not only protect herself but also help the male hero overcome his troubles. Rosamond is a typical example of such a heroine. Welty also disrupts the masculine narrative of the fairy tale by insisting on the relationship between the heroine and her birth mother. In doing so she deliberately subverts the masculine assumption that the heroine should not identify with her mother because this mother has an inferior position in society. Therefore, it is not surprising to find Welty foregrounding the relationship between the heroines and their mothers; it is a relationship which has been repressed in the masculine narrative. This connection between the heroine and her birth mother is seen by Welty as an important factor in building up the character of the daughter.

Therefore, we always observe in Welty the presence of the birth mother or the figurative mother dominating the narrative. Laura, in Delta Wedding, and Laurel, in The Optimist's Daughter, are connected to their mothers by the act of memory. Also Virgie, in The Golden Apples, is connected with both her birth mother, Miss Katie Rainey, and her figurative mother, Miss Eckhart. Similarly, Gloria, in Losing Battles, is related to her mother Rachael and her figurative mother, Miss Julia. Moreover, in Welty, the figure of the stepmother is not a factor of displacement but rather a catalyst for change. It is Fay who makes Laurel rethink

her relationship with the past, and it is Salome who alerts Rosamond to the need for an independent identity.

The focus of Chapter Three will be the second paradigm of Welty's feminine discourse is her concept of time. In fact, this paradigm is inspired by the coincidental intersection between Welty's concept of time and Kristeva's theory of women's time. As mentioned earlier, Welty's heroines are aware of the past, yet they are not obsessed with it. They are also conscious of the present, yet they do not embrace it. In turn, they intuitively believe in the future, in its promise of freedom and independence. This, however, does not mean that these heroines resign themselves to unrealistic dreams. On the contrary, they have practical plans for the future, plans which are built on what they have learned from the past and the present. For instance, in Losing Battles, Gloria is aware of the oppression inflicted upon women by masculine society. She still remembers how her mother was subsumed and how her teacher Julia Mortimer was abused by the chivalric society. Even though Julia was devoted to educating the Renfros and the Beechams, she was always criticized by them. Gloria is also aware of the present needs of the reunion; she knows that the families at Banner need Jack to remain in order to sustain the family relationships; yet, she is determined to pursue her future life with her husband away from this reunion. We hear Gloria addressing Jack: "I'll be your wife with all my heart, and that's enough for everybody, even you. I am here to be nobody but myself, and have nothing to do with the old dead past" (361). Similarly, Laurel in The Optimist's Daughter, is fully aware of the rigid values of the past,

just as she is aware of her mother's entrapment in the masculine society.

Therefore, we find her at the end leaving her mother's breadboard and saying to her stepmother Fay "I think I can get along without it" (179). Laurel sees in this board the whole solid past, a past she decides to keep only in her memory in order to be a reminder warning her in her future life. In The Golden Apples, we also find Virgie, after her mother's death, giving away all her mother's possessions to Juba. She insistently asks Juba to take all that she wants: "Juba, take it all [...] plates, knives, and forks, the plants on the porch, whatever you want" (270). Virgie realizes how the past was oppressive to women; therefore, she decides to leave it behind and focus on her future life. The future seems to hold for her golden promises because she has the skill of the musician. This promise of success is symbolically conveyed by the tears and the virgin drops of rain. Not surprisingly, however, Welty's concept of time in Delta Wedding is much more intricate than in her other novels; therefore, Chapter Three will be devoted to discussing this concept according to the paradigm established above.

The focus of Chapter Four will be the third paradigm of Welty's feminine discourse; it is the paradigm that has to do with her subtle employment of the weaving metaphor, a device which is indicative of female creativity. In her fiction, Welty weaves together many conflicting issues as well as various discourses; the outcome is a neat and beautiful tapestry in which the seemingly unrelated elements, once they are brought into dialogue, start to acquire new meanings. Marks describes Welty's process of writing in terms of this weaving metaphor: "Welty saw between the process of writing and the process of weaving or piecing

together a fabric of life, a metaphor applied to the three fates that were thought to spin, weave, and cut the thread of life" (20). In fact, this metaphor is not only relevant to Welty's style but also to her thematic concerns. In The Robber Bridegroom, for example, Welty's style is parallel to the act of weaving; she skillfully merges together mythology, history, fairy tales and local legends. The themes are also interrelated in the same manner; the problem of men's identity is closely related to that of women, and the myth and history of land in relation to the heroic quest of the frontier. Jennifer Lynn Randisi describes the structural and the thematic complexity also in terms of the weaving metaphor:

The Robber Bridegroom functions as a southern romance on both thematic and stylistic levels. The story's plot is an amalgamation [...] of the Cupid and Psyche myth and several of Grimm's tales including, among others, "The Robber Bridegroom," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," and "Cinderella." Several characters of local Mississippi legend, such as the Harpe brothers [...] and Mike Fink, also weave in and out of the narrative, carrying the actual towns of Rodney, New Orleans and Natchez from history, into local legend. (1)

In fact, all the elements enumerated above by Randisi are juxtaposed or reversed, then finally dialogized. Welty's purpose behind such a mixture of discourses is to question the fairy tale motifs which portray the female heroines as naïve, undefined and easily subjugated by the masculine world. Therefore, the theme of identity becomes the controlling factor of the whole narrative, and it

is the strong presence of the feminine, represented by Rosamond, that dissolves the mystery.

The Golden Apples is another example of Welty's manipulation of the weaving metaphor. The stories seem to be disconnected and bear no relation to each other; however, once they are juxtaposed, they turn out to be a single and integral story. The unifying factor among the stories in the collection is the encounter between the feminine and the masculine. As a consequence of this encounter, many themes emerge, and as a result the collection acquires a thematic unity. Accordingly, this weaving metaphor, which is an indication of the feminine artistic creativity, will be the focus of discussion in Chapter Four. The discussion will be limited to Losing Battles; therefore, this chapter will focus on Welty's technique of weaving together a tapestry of social and political harmony in which the role of women is essential. Welty's creative artifice emerges when she weaves together the individual interest with the public as well as feminine wisdom with masculine power. She also merges the history of the family with the history of the land; the family reunion itself becomes a device of perpetuating the history of the family in relation to Banner. It is also interesting to explore how Welty weaves in the conflicting political affiliations of the people of Banner.

The focus of Chapter Five will be the fourth paradigm of Welty's fiction; it is her feminine use of symbols and images. These symbols and images are related to women's experience in terms of their oppression in the past, their struggle in the present and their hope of change in the future. Some of these symbols are drawn from the domestic life of women; others are from history,

culture, mythology and nature. Welty uses symbols such as birds, flowers, plants, water, sun, moon, and rings, as well as images such as confluence, death bed scenes, and women's gatherings. The common denominator among these symbols and images is their relevance to understanding the relationship between women and men in a patriarchal society. Welty skillfully employs such symbols and images in order to embody women's struggle for freedom and independence. For instance, the trapped birds in the house stand for women's entrapment in masculine society, while free birds flying in the sky stand for unrestricted life. The circle symbols have to do with the myth of death and rebirth, a myth such as that of Persephone and Demeter. Welty usually appropriates such a myth in order to reaffirm the vital role of women in any process of change. In Losing Battles, circles are repeatedly used to stress this idea of change. It is interesting to observe that the central symbol in the novel is the one which brings together Jack and Gloria, a circle in which the sex ritual is portrayed as a necessary condition for the dramatic change in the lives of the Renfros and the Beechams. Also, in The Robber Bridegroom, circles are used to suggest the essential role of women in gaining identity for men. Again, the central circle in the novel is the one which combines Rosamond and Jamie. They are the center of this circle, a center which, according to Mircea Eliade, is the place of absolute truth. Other symbols such as rings are also used to show how women have been captivated by the ring. Therefore, it is no wonder that rings are often lost as is the case in Losing Battles and Delta Wedding. The quest for these lost rings is usually exaggerated to the point of ridicule. Plants

and flowers are also recurrent in Welty's fiction. For instance, the century plant in Losing Battles is stylistically foregrounded in order to parallel the myth of life and death, two essential elements to any process of rebirth. In The Optimist's Daughter, Welty draws heavily on symbols and images in order to enact a feminine consciousness and convey the specificity of women's experience. Therefore, Chapter Five will be devoted to the discussion of such symbols and images in order to demonstrate that Welty's use of feminine symbols and images is an essential paradigm in her feminine discourse.

Accordingly, and in the light of the paradigms delineated above, the four chapters following this introduction will be charted as follows: Chapter Two will investigate Welty's feminine appropriation of myth and fairy tales in The Robber Bridegroom and The Golden Apples. Chapter Three will focus on Welty's concept of woman's time in Delta Wedding. Chapter Four will discuss Welty's employment of the weaving metaphor in Losing Battles. The final chapter will be devoted to Welty's feminine use of symbols and images in The Optimist's Daughter.

Note

ⁱ The word *feminist* is used to refer to feminist ideology and school of thought while the word *feminine* is used to refer to women's style of writing.

ⁱⁱ MacDonald Daily. The term *realism* is used to refer to a set of writing conventions rather than to mimeses.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more discussion on Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor, see Louise Westling, Ravaged Gardens and Sacred Groves, 37.

^{iv} The myths referred to are Zeus, Leda and the Swan, Perseus and Medusa, Psyche and Cupid.

^v For the idea of the author as a creator, see "The Correspondence of Gerard Manly Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon", 133. Also, see Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", ch. xiii, Shelly, "Defense of Poetry," and Keats, a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds.

CHAPTER TWO

WELTY'S APPROPRIATION OF MYTHS AND FAIRY TALES IN THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM AND THE GOLDEN APPLES

I turn your face around! It is my face. That frozen rage is what I must explore- Oh secret, self-enclosed, and ravaged place! This is the gift I thank Medusa for.

(May Sarton on Medusa. qtd. in Hathaway 287)

May Sarton's sympathy for and identification with the Medusa figure is a significant indication of women's attitudes towards the coercive nature of masculine society and of their admiration for the mythical Medusa. Some, women, Welty being no exception, see in the Medusa figure an emblem of feminine desire to challenge the male heroic quest; it is the quest which can not be fulfilled unless the feminine element is repressed and ravaged. In fact, Welty's narrative discourse is marked by extensive references to classical myths, fairy tales and local legends. In most of her works, Welty refers to mythic figures such as Zeus, Leda and the Swan, Psyche and Cupid, Persephone and Demeter, Perseus and Medusa, in addition to many Homeric hymns. She also refers to fairy tales such as "Cinderella", "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Rapunzel," "The Robber Bridegroom," and other tales from the Grimm Brothers. Welty ascribes her recurrent use of such fairy tales and myths to her familiarity and love for them. In an interview with Jan Nordby Gertlund, Welty admits her conscious use of myths and fairy tales:

“It is conscious, clearly. I have lived with mythology all my life. It is just as close to me as the landscape. It naturally occurs to me when I am writing fiction. [. . .] I feel no sense of strain with legends and fairy tales and I’ve always loved them” (249-50). This statement, however, might not account for the real motive behind Welty’s use of myths and fairy tales. There seem to be reasons other than love and familiarity. In another interview with Jo Brans, Welty appears to be more explicit about the reasons behind using myths and fairy tales. She agrees with Brans that the use of myths is connected with the theme of rebirth and reactivity: “I think so. Something perhaps bigger than ordinary life allows people to be sometimes. I find it really hard to express things in any terms other than the story [...] I only think in terms of the story. Of this story” (343).

The fact that Welty stresses the story as a frame of reference for the meaning of myths suggests that she does not transmit these classical myths as they are, but rather incorporates them in her fiction in a very artistic manner.

Daniel Curley comments on Welty’s unique use of myths in The Golden Apples:

The shape of the book can be understood only if one examines Eudora Welty’s use of the old material for the creation of her own myth of human wholeness, a myth that will finally transcend not only the ancient myths of the male godhead but also the even more ancient myths of the female mysteries. (130)

In Welty’s appropriation of myth, there seems to be a kind of feminine craftsmanship, and in this craftsmanship, Welty appropriates classical myths in a certain manner that serves her feminist agenda. It is a feminine appropriation in

which Welty subverts the masculine norms and claims inherent in classical mythology and folklore. In most of her works, Welty is skeptical of the heroic quest which is limited to the male hero; it is a quest which is based on the suppression and the subjugation of the feminine element. Instead, Welty shows that this heroic quest can only succeed if it is aided and promoted by the feminine aspect. Welty is also critical of the classical notion that a male god or hero is capable of rebirth and regeneration because this hero has two sides to him, the feminine as well as the masculine. In contrast, Welty stresses the importance of the independent feminine aspect in any process of rebirth. The feminine presence has a vital role in any process of rebirth or change.

As for fairy tales, Welty is also dissatisfied with the masculine claims that underlie the narrative in such tales. She refutes the assumption that royal marriage is the only device whereby a girl can shield herself against the wickedness of women represented by the cruel stepmother. Welty is also critical of other masculine claims embedded in such tales, the claims that daughters must avoid mother figures if they want to achieve independence and maturity. Therefore, it is not unusual to find Welty subverting all these assumptions by replacing them with feminist assumptions. Welty, in turn, shows that daughters can not achieve independence without being intimately connected to the mother figure. It is only when they are in connection with the birth mothers that those daughters can achieve independent identity. The issue of women's identity is further explored by Welty's appropriation of fairy tales; in these appropriated tales, women are rebellious against the masculine definition of women.

Therefore, they strive very hard to redefine themselves by rewriting the script for their stories.

Of all Welty's works, The Robber Bridegroom and The Golden Apples are the most prolific in classical myths and fairy tales. Therefore, the focus of this chapter will be on Welty's feminine appropriation of such myths and tales in these two texts. The discussion will be based on the first paradigm established in the introductory chapter and will reveal that Welty's appropriation of classical mythology and folklore is part and parcel of her feminine discourse. It is a discourse which has at its core women's experiences in masculine society. This will include many issues that concern women, such as the struggle for independent identity, free voice, and creativity, and the ability to effect a positive change in society

In The Robber Bridegroom Welty draws much on the myth of Psyche and Cupid. Rosamond, who "was truly a beautiful golden haired girl" (32), is compared to Psyche whose beauty surpasses that of Venus. Psyche is a virgin and Rosamond is too. Psyche is from a royal family and Rosamond is the daughter of a successful merchant. Jamie Lockhart with his white teeth and long hair is compared to Cupid, the son of Venus. Randisi finds the elements of correspondence between the two stories as a sign of sameness: "Psyche's beauty, virginity and curiosity are obviously mirrored just as Cupid's beauty, secret identity and the split between daytime and nighttime worlds are reflected in the character of Jamie Lockhart"(3). Randisi goes on to find more corresponding details between the two stories. The wilderness cottage of

Psyche and Cupid is parallel to the robbers' den. In each of the two stories, the girls break their promise to keep the identity of their lovers secret. Psyche uses a lamp to reveal the identity of her lover, and Rosamond uses the recipe of her step-mother to remove the berry stains from Jamie's face in order to know his true identity. In both stories, the bridegroom uses an open window to escape (4). Such correspondence is very interesting; however, the differences are more interesting. Certainly, these differences reveal Welty's feminine appropriation of the Psyche and Cupid myth.

In this myth, it is Cupid who desires and later rapes Psyche, while in Welty's story it is Rosamond who desires and seeks the bridegroom. Her ecstatic songs reveal her strong desire to find a bridegroom:

The moon shone bright, and it cast a fair light!

"Welcome", says she "my honey, my sweet!

For I have loved thee this seven long year,

And our chance it was we could never meet." (32)

When she meets Jamie Lockhart, it is Rosamond who is sexually awakened and, according to Barbara Harrell Carson, it is Rosamond who "entices Jamie in their first encounter" (72). Furthermore, Rosamond is the one who first hints at the possibility of sexual adventure with Jamie. Through her plea, Rosamond reveals that it is in her power to give or not to give what her clothes hide: "Well, then, I suppose I must give you the dress [...] but not a thing further" (47). Later, when she is given a choice either to be killed or to go home naked, Rosamond prefers that she is physically saved, because, when the body is saved, there is a

possibility of sweetness in life. Rosamond hints at this possibility: "Why, sir, life is sweet. [...] and before I would die on the point of your sword, I would go home naked any day" (50). Rosamond also reveals an overwhelming sexual desire when she describes her encounter with the robber to her father; Rosamond's words are charged with fiery images that reflect her sexual awakening: "His horse was as red as fire" (52).

Another difference between the two stories is the fact that Psyche has two jealous sisters who are very beautiful, while in Welty's story Rosamond is envied by her stepmother who "was as ugly as the night" (33). In her appropriation of the myth, Welty wants to dismiss the masculine assumption that all women, even sisters, are evil. In fact, by this exclusion, Welty wants to stress the importance of sisterhood for women. Even Salome, who has a convincing reason to be jealous of Rosamond, is not seriously cruel; when Salome realizes that Rosamond is tied to a man without a holy bond, she remembers her situation with Clement. Accordingly, she waives her hatred for Rosamond, gives Rosamond her mother's locket and starts to advise her: "You forgot this, in your haste to leave. [...] And you had better take it this time for you might need it" (125).

A further difference between the Psyche myth and Rosamond's story is the situation of the two girls when they are in the company of their lovers. Psyche, according to Thomas Bulfinch, leads an idle and rustic life. She is lazy, doing nothing in the house; she is served by invisible servants. Bulfinch describes the idyllic life of Psyche: "where a table immediately presented itself

without any visible aid from servants” (63). Psyche is always aided by Zephyr who familiarizes her with the instructions of her husband. However, Psyche is like a prisoner; she is not allowed to leave the house. When she asks to see her two sisters, the sisters are brought to her. In contrast, Rosamond in The Robber Bridegroom is portrayed as a hard working individual; she not only looks after her robber husband but all the robbers: “So Rosamond stayed and kept the house for the robbers” (82). Furthermore, Rosamond has much more free voice than Psyche; when she decides to go and see her father, she succeeds in persuading Jamie to grant her permission for the visit. When Rosamond comes home, Salome asks her if her husband keeps her as a prisoner; Rosamond replies: “No [...] for I stay of my own accord. But I thought of my father to whom I hadn’t said good-by and it was more than I could bear and began to beg and beg until at last this very morning I received permission to come here” (117).

Another major difference between the two stories is the question of the husband’s identity. In the Psyche and Cupid myth, Cupid has a fixed identity; he is the son of Venus. Psyche’s attempts to reveal his identity do not go beyond her desire to see the face of her lover; it is mere curiosity. However, in The Robber Bridegroom, the issue of doubleness and confusion is much more dominant. Therefore, Rosamond’s drive to know her husband’s identity is more than mere curiosity; it is motivated by her desire for knowledge, knowledge that will enable her to remove the confusion about the real identity of her future husband. Rosamond’s desire for knowledge is seen as a menace to the patriarchal culture; Harrison argues: “Rosamond’s assertion of her desire for

knowledge is construed as selfish as a threat to patriarchal power and identity” (69). Rosamond has a strong urge to study Jamie’s face and “know the language it was written in” (84). She is sincere in her effort to let Jamie Lockhart have a fixed identity. With her skill and relentless effort, Rosamond succeeds in that; therefore, Jamie becomes thankful to her. The narrator comments on this final scene: “But now, in his heart, Jamie knew that he was a hero and had always been one, only with the power to look both ways and see from all sides” (185). Unlike, Psyche, Rosamond plays an important role in making her husband realize his true identity.

In addition to this subversion of the Psyche and Cupid myth, Welty further appropriates classical mythology by resorting to the use of circles. According to Randisi, Welty uses circles in order to “evoke a mythological context” (5). In classical mythology the circle is a metaphor for rebirth and renewal. Cited in Randisi, Eliade argues that the mythical circle is perpetuated by its repetitive pattern: “Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final. The circle is essentially a symbol of meaningful repetition” (5). Indeed, in The Robber Bridegroom, Welty draws heavily on the use of mythical circles. When Jamie kidnaps Rosamond, he swings her onto his horse and takes her to the ridge where “a stream of mist made a circle around them” (63). The robbers meet in circles. They also kill the Indian girl in a circle. Clement sits inside a circle of stones and Goat always dances in circles. Salome perishes in a circle made by the Indians. Randisi argues that when these circles

are combined together, they “form a kind of thematic concentricity” (5). She goes on to distinguish these circles into two types, the progressive and the literal. The former is one that enhances the action while the latter does not forward the action because the circle in this case is marked by a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. This distinction is valid and gives some insight into Welty’s use of the mythical circles. However, such a distinction runs the risk of being interpreted out of its feminist context. In fact, the progressive circle marks a kind of harmony in the relationship between the masculine and the feminine while the literal or the unprogressive is one in which either the feminine or the masculine is absent or when either of them is at odds with the other.

An example of the progressive circle is the one which encloses the two lovers, Rosamond and Jamie. When the two make love, there seems to be a kind of harmony between them because, as we suggested earlier, Rosamond has already premeditated this possibility. This circle is intended by Welty to be a sign of rebirth. This sense of rebirth is echoed by the festivity of nature:

The dark cedars sprang from the black ravine; the hanging fruit trees shone a head on their crests and were hidden again by the cedars.

[. . .] Birds flew up like sparks from a flint. Nearer and nearer they came to the river, to the highest point in the bluff. A foam of gold leaves filled the willow trees. (64-5)

Again, when Jamie and Rosamond are together, they become the center of the circle. The sense of rebirth is once again reflected in the beauty and serenity of nature: “The tender flames of the myrtle trees and the green smoke of the cedars

were the fires of their heath. In the radiant noon they found the shade, and ate the grapes from the muscadine vines" (86). In the final scene, Jamie and Rosamond also become the center of a circle; they are now tied together by the holy marriage bond. Therefore, the sense of rebirth and regeneration is reflected by the natural beauty of springtime in New Orleans: "Beauty [...] and every delight possible to the soul and the body stood hospitably, [...] a shutter opened and a flower bloomed. The very atmosphere was nothing but ariel" (182).

In contrast to these circles of rebirth, there are other circles which are associated with uncertainty and a sense of aridness. When Jamie sleeps by himself on the ground, he is encircled by the onlookers whose looks are like spikes: "there he lay on the ground under a plum tree [...] while the paths of innocent Clement, and the greedy Salome, and mad little Harpe and the reproachful Rosamond all turned like the spokes of the wheel toward this dreaming hub" (147). Another example of the unprogressive circle is the one in which Salome is placed by the Indians. In this circle Salome challenges the sun, a symbol of masculinity in the Indian's patriarchal society. It is a scene in which the feminine element is seen as a menace to this masculine society. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that such a scene ends in inevitable death: "there she stood, blue as a thistle, and over she fell, stone dead" (163). It is a symbolic scene in which the feminine should be suppressed in order to make it possible for the masculine to dominate. Welty, however, shows only the image of dead Salome to indicate that sense of aridness. A final example of the vicious and unprogressive circle is the one in which Clement is surrounded by heaps of

stones. The futility of this circle is reflected through Clement's vision of uncertainty and his perception of the monotony of time; he resigns to despair saying: "But the time of cunning has come, [...] and my time is over, for cunning is a world I will have no part in" (124).

Welty's appropriation of fairy tale motifs is another interesting feature of her feminine discourse in The Robber Bridegroom. In this novella, Welty proffers a rereading of fairy tales such as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "The Fisherman and His Wife," "Cinderella," "The Robber Bridegroom," and other tales from the Grimm Brothers. Again, as in her appropriation of myths, Welty does not literally incorporate the fairy tales into The Robber Bridegroom. On the contrary, she appropriates them in a manner that fits with her feminist agenda. Indeed, in The Robber Bridegroom, Welty makes references to various fairy tales, yet these references are meant to be a kind of parody of such tales. In this parody, Welty juxtaposes, transposes and reverses certain motifs of fairy tales. Cited in Harrison, Marilyn Arnold comments on Welty's feminine appropriation of fairy tales; she argues that:

Using what appears on the surface to be standard characters and motifs, Welty creates standard expectations in the reader; but she does not fulfill them. Instead, she subverts, reverses, burlesques and just generally scatters asunder the fairy tale sacrosanct notions about the agenda for a happily-ever-after living. (53)

In such a treatment, Welty reveals her dissatisfaction with certain masculine claims inherent in fairy tales. Welty does not seem to embrace the

notion that in order for daughters to reach maturity, they have to do away with the figure of the birth mother. She is also critical of assumptions such as that of Bettelheim, that the wickedness of the old lady or the stepmother in the fairy tales is an essential fictional technique whereby girls are helped to displace negative feelings towards their mothers. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber explicate Bettelheim's analysis of the effects of fairy tales on young girls: "From Bettelheim's perspective, the wicked (step) mother's patently evil deeds let children constructively displace onto fictional female objects those hateful, fearful thoughts they would otherwise harbor toward their own mothers"(69). Welty also tries to undermine the masculine assumption embedded in the fairy tales that the heroic quest is always limited to the male hero, the hero that rescues the heroine from the wickedness of women. Furthermore, Welty in The Robber Bridegroom rejects the story of women told by masculine society. Instead, her female characters reassert themselves by telling their own stories.

The first sign of Welty's subversion of the fairy tale motif is her choice of the heroine. Unlike the naïve and passive heroine of the fairy tale, Rosamond is exceptionally clever; she succeeds in managing her affairs without the assistance of the princely husband. Ironically, it is the stupid Goat who rescues her from the Indians. Rosamond is as beautiful as Snow White and Cinderella, yet "she is a great liar" (38). She is a girl who is about to enter the world of adulthood, so she feels the need for love and a partner in her life. Rosamond, however, does not wait at home until the potential bridegroom comes and enables her to enter this world. Unlike Goat's sisters, Rosamond goes out to seek her future lover and

bridegroom. Therefore, it is not strange to see Rosamond willingly embrace the errands entrusted to her by her stepmother. Rosamond does not see in these errands any kind of punishment as is the case in fairy tales. On the contrary, we find Rosamond getting ready for such errands as if she were going to a picnic: “So Rosamond said, ‘yes stepmother,’ and taking the time to dress herself in a light blue gown, bind her hair with a ribbon, and bake herself a little hoecake for a lunch, she made ready for the expedition” (33). Furthermore, when Rosamond goes to the Indigo field to collect herbs for her stepmother, she sings songs declaring her desire to find the potential bridegroom. When she meets the bandit, she does not show any sense of fear, but she keeps arguing with him and even threatens him that if he does any harm to her, her father and seven brothers will come and take revenge: “They will come after you for this you may be sure, and hang you to a tree before you are an hour away” (49). Later, when the bandit takes her clothes, Rosamond decides to abjure the code honor and go naked rather than being killed.

When Rosamond falls in love with Jamie Lockhart, she is fully aware of his position as a bandit. In this sense, Rosamond is different from the good fairy tale heroine whose reward is the royal prince. Unlike Snow White, Rosamond does not remain taking care of all the robbers. Instead, she devotes herself to taking care of her husband only. Rosamond, then, avoids playing the submissive role played by Snow White when she lives with the dwarfs. Cited in James M. McGlathery, Jennifer Waelti-Walters describes Snow White’s passive role as “An overt commercial for marriage, carrying with it the message that all that matters

is her appearance" (77). Rosamond, however, never remains static. On the contrary, she keeps moving from one place to another in order change her situation. Rosamond is also different from the fairy tale heroines in the sense that her relationship with Jamie has made her a questor. When she gets pregnant, she starts her heroic quest to find the father of her future children; her quest is to verify and affix the identity of her husband in order to live a happy life of her own choice. Harrison comments on this shift in the narrative: "The text's focus shifts again at this point from the story of the Robber Bridegroom to the story of the Questing Bride" (69). It is not surprising, then, to find that Rosamond's main obsession is to find her husband. When she is lost in the woods, we hear her asking everybody: "Have you seen Jamie Lockhart?" (181). Rosamond never gets desperate and keeps looking for Jamie until she finds him in New Orleans. Her joy of finding him reflects the fact that her quest has yielded results: "I came and found you" (181).

In her appropriation of "The Fisherman and His Wife", Welty shows Salome as greedy as the fisherman's wife. In this sense, Salome's attempts to dominate her husband and her cruelty towards Rosamond are mere tactics that would enable her to have access to the masculine world, the world of power and authority. In this respect, Harrison contends that: "Because she cannot enter the sphere of masculine action and acquisition like Clement and Jamie Lockhart, Salome expends her energy scheming against Clement's daughter represented as a fairy tale heroine" (52). Therefore, it is possible to argue that Salome's wickedness and cruelty towards Rosamond are not instinctive as is the case in

fairy tales; Salome's wickedness has nothing to do with Bettelheim's notion that the wickedness of the stepmother in the fairy tale functions as a kind of displacement in which the heroines get rid of the negative feelings towards their birth mothers. Furthermore, and as has been mentioned earlier, Salome's cruelty towards Rosamond does not continue up to the end as it happens in fairy tales such as "Snow White," "The Fisherman and His Wife," or "Cinderella".

Salome's cruelty towards Rosamond comes to an end once the former realizes that Rosamond's situation in marriage is similar to hers. Accordingly, Salome reconciles with Rosamond and even helps her in her pursuit to find her husband: "So the next day Salome got Rosamond away alone and they were sitting by the well, like a blood mother and daughter" (122). Even at the end when the Indians ask for Rosamond to be brought for their act of revenge, we find Salome offering herself: "Now will you choose me?" (160). Salome feels that she shares with Rosamond her struggle against patriarchal society; therefore, she volunteers to be taken instead of Rosamond. Salome feels that it is her duty to challenge the masculine society of the Indians. It is not surprising, then, to see her dance and defy the sun, the symbol of the Indian masculine society: "No one is to have power over me" (160). In this sense, the destruction of Salome can not be considered as a kind of retribution over her cruelty towards Rosamond, but rather the price that women pay when they are in defiance of masculine society. The unhappy fate of Salome is also meant to be a kind of parody of the fairy tale motifs in which the order of the patriarchal society is restored by getting rid of such rebellious women as Salome.

Welty also makes parody of certain masculine assumptions embedded in fairy tales. For instance, there is an assumption that the birth mother figure causes damaging effects on daughters; therefore, the absence of the birth mother figure is deliberate in fairy tales. This absence is seen as a necessary step towards the psychological development of daughters. Fisher and Silber shed some light on such an assumption; they argue that in fairy tales, the mother figure is seen as a danger; therefore, this figure is usually repressed by masculine narrative:

She must be 'killed off' or repressed so that her benevolence remains frozen in its purity [...] the tales allow the biological mother to leave the story adored, content to sit by a window and sew, contemplating her child-to-be [...] should this woman live beyond the earlier narrative moments, she would inevitably become the interfering maternal presence of the Oedipal years. (71)

In The Robber Bridegroom, however, Rosamond's birth mother has a very important role in shaping her identity. Rosamond harbors deep love for her dead mother. Realizing the strong connection between the birth mother and her child, Rosamond appeals to Jamie to leave her by reminding him of this connection: "were you born of a woman? For the sake of your mother, who may be dead in her grave, like mine, I pray you to leave me with my underbody" (49). In fact, Rosamond's birth mother is represented by the locket she leaves for her daughter. This locket is supposed to function as a magic token that protects the heroine against any possible harm. Welty seems to subvert this notion;

Rosamond's locket does not perform any magical mission. However, this locket keeps reminding Rosamond of her state of affairs: "she always took hold of her mother's locket which she wore on a silver chain, and the locket would seem to speak of its own accord. What it never failed to say was, 'if your mother could see you now, her heart would break'." (34). This seems to be a kind of parody; however, the fact that the locket keeps speaking seems to be a reminder of the mother's concern over her daughter. Therefore, the intruding words of the locket seem to give Rosamond momentum to keep moving on in order to change her situation. In this sense, this metaphoric presence seems to be essential to forming the identity of Rosamond. Once the situation of Rosamond would break the heart of her mother, she will do her best to change it. When Salome reconciles with Rosamond, she realizes the importance of that locket to Rosamond, so she gives it back to her in order to be of help to her in her quest. The locket, then, is kept in the possession of Rosamond in order to warn her of any danger. In fact, the act of returning the locket reaffirms Welty's subversion of fairy tale motifs in two ways. First, it demonstrates the importance of the role of the birth mother in the maturation process of her daughter. Second, it excludes the stepmother's wickedness as a factor in this process. In this sense, Welty debunks the masculine claim made by Bettelheim about the importance of this wickedness in developing the identity of the stepdaughter.

A final sign of Welty's appropriation of the fairy tale motifs is her focus on the need of the female characters to redefine themselves by writing the script of their own stories. This need for self-definition recalls Gilbert and Gubar's call for

women to rewrite their own texts. In The Robber Bridegroom, Salome as well as Rosamond seems to reject the masculine definition of women. It is a definition that is based in the dichotomy that women are either angelic like Snow White or demonic like stepmothers and mothers in-law. Welty's depiction of Salome is similar to that of the fisherman's wife and other stepmothers in fairy tales. She, however, shows that Salome's greed and monstrous deeds are only attempts to control the plot of her own story. Salome seems to be a rebellious woman who is not satisfied with the masculine script of her story. Clement's story of Salome is typical of masculine narrative: "From the first, Salome turned her eyes upon me with less question than demand, and that is the most impoverished gaze in the world. There was no longer anything but ambition left in her destroyed heart" (24). Clearly, Salome's story as narrated by Clement is a story of a woman who finds in matrimony protection and a means to fulfill her ambition. However, Harrison argues that Salome's pursuit of wealth and her plotting against Rosamond are seen as "disruptive forms of storytelling" (64). These forms are perceived as attempts on the part of Salome to write the script of her own story. Harrison confirms: "The goals of Salome's plots, like those of the fisherman's wife, are power, choice, autonomy and wealth- all characteristics of the masculine world of action" (64). In her attempt to make up her own story, Salome has Clements and Goat work for her. Unfortunately, these attempts are doomed to failure because the masculine control of society is insurmountable. Therefore, it is not unusual that, at the end, Salome is destroyed; she becomes a dead body to be claimed by Clement who declares: "I own her body" (164).

Rosamond, in turn, seems to reject the masculine definition of herself. Rosamond is as beautiful as the fairy tale heroines, yet she is not as passive and stupid as they; she refuses to play the role assigned to her by masculine narrative. Rosamond is a skillful liar, yet her lies are like “diamonds” falling from her mouth. These lies are merely an attempt on Rosamond’s part to rework the traditional script of the fairy tale heroine, the heroine whose fate outside marriage is only seduction, rape and death. In this respect, Harrison argues that Rosamond’s lies are a subversion of masculine narrative: “Rosamond, the heroine of The Robber Bridegroom, also uses a covert form of storytelling to subvert the patriarchal script in which she lives powerlessly” (65). Therefore, it is not surprising to see Rosamond refuse to play the role of a naïve and dumb fairy tale heroine, the heroine that is usually given away as a gift to the princely husband. Rosamond’s father, who has a specific masculine script for his daughter, realizes the danger of his daughter’s lies; therefore, he tries to silence her by marrying her to a man who would teach her to be true: “Now and then he remarked that if a man could be found anywhere in the world who could make her tell the truth, he would turn her over to him” (39). Against Clement’s wish Rosamond keeps telling lies. When she meets Jamie Lockhart, Rosamond lies to him. Again, Rosamond sees in her lies a means of protection and a way to avert playing the traditional role of the fairy tale heroine. In fact, by her lies, Rosamond seeks options other than the unfortunate fate of the fairy tale heroine, who is either given as a gift to the chivalric bridegroom or mercilessly killed. However, Rosamond, through her words and deeds, shows her will to inscribe

herself as a subject rather than an object; she has a strong desire to be the author of her own story. Accordingly, it is not strange when we find Rosamond appreciative of the mail rider's view of the relation between the story and its author. The mail rider affirms this relationship when he tells Rosamond: "For this is what happened to me and not to you and it is my business whether the persimmons were ripe or not" (177). Just like the mail rider, Rosamond also believes that what happens to her makes up her own story; however, unlike the mail rider, she thinks that her story has a message not out of the past but "it is from out of the future" (177). Accordingly, Rosamond's pursuit to marry a man of her own choice and her effort to enable Jamie to transform from a life of theft into a life of honesty and responsibility, are an indication of her success at reworking the script of the fairy tale heroine, a script of a new story with a futuristic message.

To sum up, Welty, in The Robber Bridegroom, has been very successful in her appropriation of classical mythology and fairy tales. The issues she has raised, concerning the heroic quest, the need for women to redefine themselves and the relation between the feminine and the masculine, are all central to her feminine discourse. In this sense, the subversion of the Psyche and Cupid myth, in addition to the reversal of roles and motifs in fairy tales such as "Cinderella," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Rapunzel," "The Robber Bridegroom," and "The Fisherman and His wife," is evidence of her feminist concerns. These concerns are also addressed in Welty's collection of stories, The Golden Apples. In these stories, Welty also appropriates classical myths such as Zeus, Leda and

the Swan, and Perseus and Medusa. In her appropriation of these myths, Welty makes use of Christian mythology as well as symbolism. Again, Welty stresses the importance of harmony in the relationship between the masculine and the feminine, because without such harmony, there will be no possibility for any process of rebirth or regeneration. In this respect, Welty, in The Golden Apples, shows how masculine power will wane and finally become invalid if it persists in subsuming and oppressing the feminine element.

In this collection of stories, the first myth Welty draws on heavily is that of Zeus, the Greek god of power and daunting masculinity. Zeus is believed to have been capable of rebirth by himself, because he embodies both the feminine and the masculine. In fact, King MacLain, as described by Katie Rainey, can be easily identified with the Zeus figure. MacLain is as mysterious as Zeus, and, like Zeus, he disappears and reappears. Once MacLain gets married to Snowdie, his presence in Morgana becomes as mysterious as that of Zeus who moves between the sky and the earth. Just like Zeus, MacLain is associated with light and showers of gold. In this sense, MacLain's contact with Snowdie is similar to that of Zeus with Danaë; therefore, Snowdie's conception of the MacLain twins echoes Danaë's conception of Perseus. Mrs. Rainey tells us about the sudden pregnancy of Snowdie: "It was like a shower of something had struck her, like she had been caught out in something bright" (7). Also, like Zeus, MacLain is a rapist. In "Sir Rabbit," MacLain appears suddenly to Mattie Will and her husband, Junior Holifield. These two are hunting in the woods when MacLain attacks, frightens Holifield with a gunshot, and rapes Mattie Will

afterward. The rape incident, which recalls the myth of Leda and the Swan, reflects the violent nature of MacLain: "Now he clasped her to his shoulder, and her tongue tasted sweet starch [...] and she was Mr. MacLain's Doom or Mr. MacLain's weakness" (108). MacLain's twins, Randal and Eugene, are frightening to their father in the same way Perseus was frightening to Zeus. When MacLain comes to visit Snowdie, the two sons scare their father to death: "and they told her a booger had come up on the front porch and when they went out to see him he said, 'I am going. You stay', so they chased him down the steps and run him off" (16). Accordingly, MacLain and his two sons, in addition to Loch Morrison, establish themselves as the representatives of masculine power in the whole collection of The Golden Apples.

In spite of all these corresponding elements between the Zeus myth and the MacLains' story, Welty develops the myth in her own way; she appropriates the Zeus myth in a manner that suits her feminine concerns and her latent feminist agenda. In this sense, the correspondence between Zeus and the MacLains is only superficial. Julia Demmin and Daniel Curley comment on the difference between them: "The identification of King MacLain with Zeus is obvious and has been well documented, but King's godlike power is nowhere more important than in its limitations and its failure and its conflict with the opposing female power" (130). In fact, Demmin and Curley's remarks about the conflict between the masculine and the female power give much insight into Welty's perception of the ideal relationship between the opposing forces, the masculine and the feminine. Welty, as is the case in The Robber Bridegroom,

does not think that any process of rebirth or regeneration is possible without having the feminine aspect emerge as an independent and free power. In order to achieve such independence, the feminine power must seek to undermine the oppressive power of masculinity. It is then that the rebirth process will have its regenerating power. In this respect, the conflict between the emergent feminine power and oppressive masculinity becomes a central issue in The Golden Apples. In this collection, Welty seems to be critical of the masculine claims embedded in classical myths such as Zeus, Leda and the Swan, Perseus and Medusa, and others. Welty, therefore, reworks the masculine narrative of such myths by asserting the role of women in any rebirth process. It is true that the MacLains are the embodiment of the Zeus figure; they as well as their surrogates want to impose themselves as a masculine power that oppresses female power. Ironically, in doing so, they lose their power and finally become invalid; in the meantime, femininity starts to acquire a stronger role in the rebirth process. This does not mean that Welty wants to eradicate masculinity in order to make femininity thrive at the expense of masculinity; Welty thinks that masculinity is required in any process of rebirth, but it should first rid itself of its oppressive nature.

In "Shower of Gold", Welty, in the story of King MacLain and Snowdie, seems to disrupt the masculine narrative embedded in the myths of Zeus and Leda and the Swan. She also thwarts the heroic quest of the male hero. On the surface, the story of Snowdie and King MacLain seems to follow the script of the masculine narrative. King MacLain gets married to Snowdie in the MacLain

Presbyterian church. Once he inseminates his seeds in the form of showers of gold that touch Snowdie, MacLain leaves Morgana and wanders aimlessly in the invisible world. Speaking about the illusiveness of MacLain, Plez tells Miss that he was not sure whether he had seen MacLain or his ghost: "Course, could have been a ghost" (18). The pregnant Snowdie, who is left alone in the MacLains' house, gives birth to twins. As any faithful wife would, Snowdie remains in MacLain's house to take care of her two sons. Katie Rainey tells us about Snowdie's perseverance: "She just went on keeping the house and getting fairly big with what I told you already was twins, and she seemed content like a little white kitty in a basket"(8). In fact, Snowdie's contentment does not mean that she acquiesces to play the role of a submissive wife who succumbs to the Kingly power and authority. On the contrary, Snowdie starts to emerge as an independent subject of a new feminine narrative, a narrative in which she asserts her dynamic role in the process of rebirth. We learn from Mrs. Rainey that Snowdie was educated by her parents in order to become a teacher at a Sunday school of male supervisors. Snowdie instead follows a different course; she agrees to marry King MacLain in order to escape playing the traditional role of the old maid. In this respect, Rebecca Marks argues that: "By marrying King MacLain, Snowdie steps onto the battleground" (33). Indeed, it is a battleground where Snowdie refuses to play the role of the victim, as is the case in masculine narrative.

By having Snowdie marry MacLain, Welty wants her to penetrate the mythological world in order to situate herself as an important factor in the rebirth

process, a process which has been monopolized by the Zeus figure. Against Mrs. Rainey's expectation, Snowdie does not rage over her new situation; Mrs. Rainey wonders: "Why didn't she rage and storm a little – to me, anyway, just Mrs. Rainey" (8). Snowdie seems to be different from Mrs. Rainey; she does not rebel against MacLain. Welty, then, seems to be willing to give Snowdie a role in the myth of rebirth and fertility. Marks comments on the distinction between the two women: "Katie fights the hero as the enemy of women; Snowdie loves him as fertility consort. Katie lives in the social and economic world of the present, Snowdie lives in the mythological world of the past, present and future" (40). Indeed, Snowdie wants to inscribe her script in the fertility myth without the intervention of any outside influence. In other words, she wants to be the author of her own story. In naming her children after her parents, Snowdie asserts the matriarchal role in the process of fertility. Furthermore, Snowdie stresses her role as a mother, thus attaining the first aspect of the triple goddess^v. Accordingly, Welty reworks the masculine narrative inherent in the Zeus myth. Snowdie is not merely a recipient of MacLain's seeds, but rather a mother who is aware of her role in any process of rebirth or fertility.

In addition to her subversion of the Zeus myth, Welty also subverts the myth of Leda and the Swan. In the classical myth, Zeus, disguised as a Swan, rapes Leda, the wife of Tyndareus and the mother of Helen. As a result of this rape, Leda gives birth to twins, Castor and Pollux. In fact, the story of Snowdie and MacLain resonates with the myth of Leda and the Swan. Also, in giving birth to twins, Snowdie can be identified with Hera, the mother of the moon goddess

Eurynome, and Epona, the white horse goddess. In imparting all these mythical attributes to Snowdie, Welty suggests that Snowdie does not play the role of the victim; these attributes make her transcend the victim's role. In her decision to marry MacLain, Snowdie seems to have other options than the only option prescribed by the masculine narrative. Mrs. Rainey refers to Snowdie's decision of marrying MacLain: "And like, 'look, everybody, this is what I think of Morgana and MacLain Courthouse and all the way between'- further, for all I know- 'marrying a girl with pink eyes', 'I swan' we all say, just like what he wants to scoundrel"(4). Katie seems to be angry with women who conform to MacLain's script for women; however, the fact that she "swans", meaning she swears that this is what MacLain wants, suggests that women might want something different, a different script. In addition, Mrs. Rainey seems to be playing with the word "swan"; it is a word which might connect women with the myth of Leda and the Swan. Marks comments on Welty having Rainey and other women use the word "swan":

In putting the swan in their mouths, Welty reverses the rape of Leda. In both Greek and Celtic religions, the swan is a traditional symbol of artistic creation, divination and regeneration, able to soar from the earth to the sky and back. The women become artists as they reverse this myth. (39)

This interpretation seems to be valid because Katie and Snowdie have often been involved in artistic creation. Katie refers to Snowdie and herself making use of clothes scraps: "snatching every scrap from the shirts and flannels me and Snowdie was cutting out on the dining room table- sometimes we could grab

a little boy and baste something up on him.” (12). Assuming that Snowdie is an artist, she can be easily identified with the swan, not as a victim of the masculine hero but rather as a creative artist who has the ability to transcend the oppressive masculine values.

In “Sir Rabbit” as well, the rape incident of Mattie Will echoes the myth of Leda and the Swan. What is interesting, however, is the way in which Welty subverts this myth. Even though King MacLain rapes Mattie Will, his power is put into question. In fact, Welty overshadows Mattie’s encounter with MacLain by her encounter with her two sons. In this encounter, the two sons are portrayed as baby- like; they circle Mattie and make her dizzy. Mattie, however, is not like Leda; she overcomes the twins: “Then she rolled her head and dared the other twin, with her teeth at his ear, since they were all in this together, all in here equally now, where it had been quiet as moonrise to her” (100). Therefore, in making Mattie MacLain’s “Doom and Weakness”, Welty suggests that Mattie is not playing the traditional role of a rape victim; she is not Leda who is ravaged by the ruthless swan. Mattie’s perception of MacLain does not reflect the horror Leda felt when she was raped by the swan. Even before meeting him, Mattie entertains the idea of having an encounter with King MacLain; the song running in her head seems to anticipate such an encounter:

In the night of time

At the right time

So I’ve understood,

This is the habit of Sir Rabbit

To dance in the wood. (11)

In fact, this rhyme reveals Mattie's anterior perception of King MacLain; she knows in advance that he is a man of great fecundity and it is his habit to meet women in the woods. Accordingly, Mattie does not expect MacLain to be deadly frightening; she knows what he looks for. This expectation is substantiated when she gazes at him while he is asleep; he is not a formidable figure, but no more than "a heap of cane thrown up by the mill and left in the spit to dry" (11).

After being raped by MacLain, Mattie does not behave like a rape victim as is the case in masculine narrative, but she becomes a keen observer who moves in all directions to make sense of what happened to her: "But she moved. She was the mover in the family. She jumped up. Besides she heard plums falling into the bucket-sounds of pure complaint by this time" (109). She is sexually awakened and, in effect, sensually invigorated. In contrast to rape victims of traditional masculine narrative, Mattie is conscious of what happened to her; therefore she is in a position to tell her own story. Marks sees in Mattie's free voice to tell her rape story a sign of disrupting the masculine narrative: "In Mattie Will's telling of her story, the conventional rape narrative has been disturbed. Unlike Leda, Mattie Will is not a helpless victim, not 'mastered by brute blood of the air [...] She is both subject and object, both artist and artifice, both author and text" 105). Welty also subverts the masculine rape narrative in a different way; she does not depict the rape incident as a romantic adventure where the rapist experiences a kind of pleasure over the helplessness of his victim. In fact, the rape incident seems to be more figurative than literal:

But he put on her with the effort of his body, the affront of his sense too.

No pleasure in that, she had to put on what he knew with what he did [...]

and no matter what happened to her, she had to remember

disappointments are not to be born by Mr. MacLain. (108)

Furthermore, Welty subverts the Leda and Swan myth by showing MacLain as a victim of the rape incident; he is the one whom Mattie robs of his knowledge and power, two essential factors whereby fertility can be brought about. With this newly acquired power, Mattie starts to acquire motherly feelings: "With her almost motherly sway of the head and the arms to help her, she gazed at the sounding-off, sleeping head [...] He snored as if all the frogs of spring were inside him" (110). Mattie, then, becomes aware of her motherly role in any rebirth process. This rebirth process is dealt with much more explicitly in "Moon Lake."

In this story, the resurrection of Easter is a turning point in the conflict between the oppressive masculine power and the female magical power. Zeus' power, which is represented by Loch Morrison, Mr. Holifield and Ran, is losing its grip. Such males are described by Demmin and Curley as "exiles and pariahs with the exception Ran, who is indispensable" (133). Indeed, all of these males except Ran are found to be ineffective in Easter's revival. In this revival, Welty seems to appropriate the Zeus myth by employing symbolism and Christian mythology. In this respect, Easter's name refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, yet the resurrected person here is not a man but an orphan girl, a girl who is connected to the mother figure rather than the father. Easter says: "I have not

got a father, I never had, he ran away. I have got a mother" (134). Suzan Harrison sheds light on the symbolic connotations of Easter's name and status: "Merely by the virtue of being orphan, Easter stands as an emblem of liberty from social constraints [...] Easter has no name, no *father's* name; she transcends the discursive limitations that silence women"(60). With all these mythical and symbolic attributes, Easter comes to represent a strong magical power, a power which is not less than the power of Zeus.

When Easter drowns in the lake, Loch brings her out of the water and tries to resuscitate her. It is true that this scene is parallel to Perseus' rescuing of Andromeda from the sea, but as Daneile Pitavy - Souques argues, the equation with Perseus is not as important as the sexual coloration: "Perseus and Andromeda and their love affair have no part in the plot. What is most impressive is the sexual coloration of the life saving process" (111). Indeed, Loch's lifesaving efforts are repugnant to all the girls; they are a representation of a sexual act:

The Boy Scout reached in and gouged out her mouth with his hand, an unbelievable act. She did not alter. He lifted up, screwed his toes, and with a groan of his own fell upon her and drove up and down upon her [...] Lifesaving was much worse than they had dreamed. Worse still was the carelessness of Easter's body. (145)

It is then, Lizzie, the camp mother, who interferes and, in effect, Loch's act becomes insignificant; under her gaze "he was reduced almost to a mosquito" (141). By having Miss Lizzie interfere, Welty wants to impart a mythological

context to the revival process. Therefore, it is not strange when we see Lizzie keeping Loch away from Easter; she does not want Loch to succeed in preventing Easter from having access to the unconscious world, the world of power and knowledge which are essential to any process of rebirth. Lizzie, however, realizes that the female power can not in itself effect rebirth; some of Zeus's knowledge is needed to witness the revival. Therefore, when Lizzie asks Ran to keep away, she does not necessarily mean that he should leave the place: "Get away from me Ran MacLain", Lizzie called towards him. 'Your dogs and guns, keep away, we've already got all we can put up with out here'" (149). However, when Easter is revived, Miss Lizzie feels that Ran's presence is no longer needed: "Why don't you go home now" (152). The resurrection of Easter brings about a new spirit of rebirth, a thing which fascinates the other girls and makes them identify with Easter: "Their minds could hardly capture it again, the way Easter was standing free in space, then handled and turned over by the blue air itself" (154). Speaking about the effect of Easter's experience, Harrison confirms: "Easter's immersion in Moon Lake becomes a symbol of baptism, reminding Morgana of the mysteries of death and sexuality that the community seek to ignore (61). Indeed, the death of male sexuality becomes a major problem in both "The Whole World Knows" and "Music From Spain".

In "The Whole World Knows", the conflict between masculinity and femininity is overwhelmingly resolved in favor of female power. The female sexual identity, which has emerged with Snowdie and Mattie Will and later has been reinforced by Cassie Morrison, Virgie Rainey in "June Recital" and Easter in

“Moon Lake,” reaches its apex with Jinny and Maideen in “The Whole World Knows.” In contrast to the clamoring female power, the oppressive masculine power represented by the MacLains, Loch and Exum has reached a dead end. Ran, who has inherited the Kingly masculinity, has almost become sexually ineffective; he is unable to cope with the overriding sexuality of his wife Jinny and his consort Maideen. In this sense there is a sharp reversal of the Zeus myth; female sexuality has become a real challenge to Ran. Ran is unable to respond to Jinny’s powerful sexuality. In a very dramatic manner, Welty shows Ran’s inability to match the sexuality of Jinny: “Jinny- not out playing croquet- stood with her legs apart, cutting locks of her hair at the hall mirror. The locks fell at her feet. [. . .] She looked up at me, short range, and said ‘just in time, to tell me when to stop” (161). In response to this daunting female sexuality, Ran invokes his father: “Father, I wish I could go back” (161). This scene which reflects the waning power of the Zeus figure is seen by Marks as a reversal of the Leda and the Swan myth: “In the reversal of the Leda and swan myth, Ran is taken by the swanlike Jinny” (161). Jinny’s frustration with Ran pushes her into a relationship with Woody, a man younger than she. Ran, who still clings to the oppressive masculine values he inherited from his father, can not understand the reasons behind Jinny’s behavior, so he gets angry with Woody and imagines killing him many times. The women of Morgana ask Ran to forgive Jinny. Miss Perdita urges Ran to go and reconcile with his wife: “Randal, when are you going back to your precious wife? You forgive her, now you hear? That’s no way to do, bear

grudges. Your mother never bore your father a single grudge in her life, and made her life right hard” (158).

Drawing heavily on Frazer’s “The Golden Bough”, Marks argues that Ran is a failed fertility hero who should cure himself by reconnecting with “the earth and his own sexuality” (146). In this respect, the appeals of Morgana women for Ran to return to his wife represent the community’s desire for rebirth and regeneration in the world of Morgana. Ran, however, realizes that his crisis is both physical and spiritual; he feels that he is crippled by the heavy burden he inherited from his father. It is not strange, then, to hear Ran appealing to his father: “Father! Dear God wipe it clean. Wipe it clean, wipe it out. Don’t let it be” (172). Indeed Ran is a disillusioned hero who lacks the knowledge of how to deal with and love women. Ironically, Ran can take care of lady Bella, the dog, while he is unable to deal with women. Ran’s reference to the dog “Lady” does reflect men’s ambivalent attitude towards women in Southern society; he still clings to the masculine values he has inherited from his father. When Ran takes Maideen to Vicksburg, he does not know how to make love with her; he behaves like a rapist: “I lay there and after a while I heard her again. She lay there by the side of me, weeping for herself. The kind of soft, patient, meditative sobs a child will venture along after punishment” (181). This incident however, has been very meaningful to Ran; for the first time he realizes how his father’s rapist tradition has been very painful to women; Ran wonders: “Father, Eugene! What you went and found, was it better than this?”(181). It is a moment of full understanding of

the oppressive nature of King MacLain's masculinity. Ran, who is now physically and spiritually awakened, starts to look for Jinny: "And where is Jinny?"(181).

Similarly, in "Music From Spain", Eugene also has a tense relationship with his wife Emma. It is true that Eugene does not want to be like his father, yet ironically, as remarked by Demmin and Curley, "The son who rejects his father is in some way closer to old King than the one who, in the Maideen episode at least, seems to be trying to carry on the kingly tradition" (136). Eugene, like his brother Ran, is unable to deal with his wife Emma. However, Eugene's problem is not sexual but rather a fidelity problem; he lacks the knowledge of how to respond to his wife's criticism of him. At the beginning of "Music From Spain", Eugene slaps his wife in the face only because she told him to "crumb his own chin" (182). Emma is of a stronger character than Eugene; she is also much more knowledgeable than he in domestic affairs. In this sense, her large body is a symbol of her more fully developed character. Emma realizes that Eugene's problem is one of knowledge; he is too much obsessed with the abstract world. Therefore, her remark about the crumb on his chin is only an attempt on her part to draw Eugene's attention to the world of reality. Eugene, then, is no longer the hero who has mythical knowledge, a knowledge which connects the abstract and physical realities. Eugene does not know how to respond to his wife's remark. The only way he can respond is to slap her; it is an act he is familiar with because he has the power, not the knowledge. Emma dominates Eugene by the food she prepares for him; this shows that his instinctive desires are checking his independence. Eugene is not aware of the value of his senses; his crisis is also

a sensual one. Eugene, who was once a student in Miss Elkhart's music class, has forgotten music. When he leaves his wife, he goes out to roam in the streets of San Francisco in the company of the Spaniard. When he hears the music played by this Spaniard, Eugene identifies with him: "Eugene has been easily satisfied of one thing- the formidable artist was free. There was no one he loved, to tell him anything to lay down the law" (201).

In fact, the relationship between Eugene and the Spaniard goes beyond the fact that the latter is an artist; there seems to be something that attracts Eugene to the Spaniard; Eugene appears to have found in the Spaniard a kind of love and refuge he does not find in his relationship with Emma. Therefore, it is not strange to see Eugene in an intimate relationship with the Spaniard: "Eugene clung to the Spaniard now, almost as if he had waited for him a long time with longing, almost as if he loved him, and had found a lasting refuge" (221). Indeed, in the presence of the Spaniard Eugene feels like a child who looks for love and protection. Franzisca Gygax sheds some light on the nature of the love between Eugene and the Spaniard; she argues: "It seems as if Eugene's desire for 'a secret in the day' is inextricably intertwined with love. This love is not traditionally sanctified love between a man and a woman, but the love, or the attraction, between a man looking for fulfillment and another representing love, art (music), and exoticism for the former"(65). It is interesting to see how Eugene's relationship with the Spaniard has sexually awakened the former. This sexual awakening has made Eugene imagine himself having sex with Emma, but again in this vision Eugene feels weaker. In fact, Eugene's problem seems to be far

beyond sexuality; he has to get rid of the sense of ignorance he has inherited from his father. It is not a surprise, then, to hear Eugene at the beginning describing his father in a very negative way: "King MacLain was an old goat, a black name *he* had" (202). Intuitively, Eugene realizes that the oppressive masculine power he has inherited from his father is the main cause of his ordeal. Eugene, then, is not the daunting and heroic but rather the weak and paranoid Perseus.

A final example of Welty's feminine appropriation of classical mythology in The Golden Apples is her recurrent use of the Perseus and Medusa myth. In Greek mythology, Medusa, who had once been a beautiful woman, was turned into a monster only because she made a mistake by sleeping with Poseidon in Athena's temple. The monstrous Medusa, then, had coiling snakes for her hair and a deadly gaze which would transform men into stone. This frightening figure became the target of Perseus's heroic quest; therefore, with the help of some gods and the intrigue of Athena, Perseus managed to decapitate Medusa and use her head as an instrument of terror in order to vanquish his enemies. With the lethal gaze of Medusa and his own sword, Perseus overcame the dragon that chained Andromeda to a rock in the sea. Welty, who is fully aware of the masculine claims inherent in this myth, makes many references to the Medusa figure in most of the stories of The Golden Apples. Although mainly in "The Wanderers," Welty appropriates the myth by subverting the masculine claims embedded in it; Medusa is no longer an image of separation or horror, but rather

an image of beauty and integrity; she is an emblem of artistic creativity and renewal.

In "The Wanderers", Virgie Rainey, the talented music student of Miss Eckhart in "June Recital", is now over forty. Like other people in Morgana, Virgie is a wanderer, yet as Franzisca Gygax puts it: "she is the embodiment of the wanderer who does not seem to be defeated" (67). Virgie, a free and independent woman, has grown up into an artist figure, an artist who is fully aware of the contradictory aspects of life. Mrs Katie Rainey describes the artistic skill of her daughter in a symbolic manner: "There is nothing Virgie loves more than struggling against a real hard plaid" (243). Virgie's struggle can be understood in her attempt to reconcile the contradictory things in life; it is the struggle of the artist who solves life's puzzles. With this vigorous artistic sense and vision, Virgie can see in the myth of Perseus and Medusa what Miss Eckhart used to see; she can see that the heroic act of Perseus can not be separated from that of Medusa:

Cutting off the Medusa's head was the heroic act, perhaps, that made a horror in life that was at once the horror in love. Virgie thought- the separateness. She might have seen heroism prophetically, but she was never a prophet. Because Virgie saw things in their time, like hearing them- and because she must believe in the Medusa equally with Perseus- she saw the stroke of the sword in three movements, not one. (275)

This vision had been perceived earlier by Miss Eckhart, but then, Miss Eckhart could do nothing about it; in other words it was merely a dream. Carol Ann

Johnston describes Miss Eckhart's vision as a verbal capacity "to represent at once female and male, monster and a slayer monster" (100). Miss Eckhart never has the ability to put into action her artistic vision; she is unable to go beyond the mere representation. Virgie, however, goes beyond the static representation into actual experiencing of the heroic acts embedded in the myth of Perseus and Medusa. Unlike her teacher, Virgie struggles hard against the constraints of the masculine society in Morgana; therefore, she gains independence and freedom that enable her to assume either the heroic quest of Perseus or the defiant and heroic act of Medusa. Accordingly, in deconstructing the myth of Perseus and Medusa, Welty gives Virgie more landscape to pursue her heroic quest.

On her mother's death bed, we see Virgie dodging death in the same way Perseus did when he wanted to avoid death in his encounter with Medusa. Virgie, unlike Cassie Morrison, will not give in to death and separateness; the death of a mother is not the end of life but rather an extension of it through the daughter's survival. Welty dramatizes Virgie's reaction to her mother's death by showing how she visually responds to this incident:

Virgie knelt crouched there. She held her head, her mouth opened and one by one the pins fell, fell out on the floor. She was not afraid of death, either of its delay or of its surprise. [. . .] The bed, the headboard dark and ungiving as an old mirror on the wall, to her as a child a vast King Arthur shield that might have concealed a motto, cast its afternoon shadow dark as muscadine to her mother's waist. (236)

Clearly, in this scene, Virgie holds to life in the same way Perseus holds to life in his encounter with Medusa. Marks comments on Virgie's effort to assert her survival:

She holds her head as Katie's falls. The shadow that falls over her mother is the shadow not only of King Arthur's shield but of Perseus's mirror, which he uses to protect himself from the Medusa and from death. Virgie holds her head as if to make certain she has not been slain with her mother. (242)

Holding to life, Virgie, with her green fingers, is portrayed as the goddess of fertility who would bring rebirth and regeneration to Morgana. In this sense, it is not surprising when we see Virgie's gaze not as lethal as that of the repressed Medusa; once Virgie turns her gaze from the solid headboard to the window, we have a scene of life and renewal: "Flowers and leaves in heavy light like a jar of figs in syrup held. A humming bird darted, fed, darted" (236).

A further example of Welty's subversion of the Medusa myth is when Virgie celebrates the integrity and the freedom of her body. Just before her mother's funeral, Virgie goes to swim in the Big Black River naked; she is in complete harmony with her body and the natural surroundings:

She saw her waist disappear into reflectionless water; it was like waking into the sky, some impurity of skies. All was warmth, air, water, and her own body. All seemed one weight, one matter- until as she put down her head and closed her eyes and the light slipped under her lids, she felt this

matter a translucent one, the river, herself, the sky all vessels which the sun filled. (248)

Virgie is physically and spiritually uplifted because of the wholeness of her body and its harmony with nature, and the sun, the masculine symbol which does not fall as a shower of gold. Marks describes this moment as the most dramatic because “Medusa’s head and body are one” (249). When Virgie leaves the river, she is not threatened by the presence of the two little boys; she is not disturbed or scared in the same way the girls in “Moon Lake” were frightened and threatened by Loch and Exum. Virgie, however, starts to weep and shed tears, but her tears are not of sadness but of anger. It is the anger of Medusa. Virgie feels angry with the people of Morgana for their failure; she is angry with Miss Eckhart for denying her talent. She is also angry with Cassie Morrison who fails to overcome the shock of her mother’s death; she is angry with Jinny and the MacLains for their inability to maintain hope.

It is then that Virgie, like Laurel in The Optimist’s Daughter, decides to give away all which she inherits from her mother; she gives Juba and her sister Minerva all, which represents the solid past, but also like Laurel she decides to keep the past only in her memory in order to reflect upon it in her future life. At this triumphant moment, Virgie remembers her figurative mother, Miss Eckhart. It is true that Virgie is angry with her music teacher but she never hates her; she loves her even though she does not embrace her attitude towards art and life. Virgie remembers Miss Eckhart’s gift to her, the Beethoven, but as Marks explains, Virgie has her own way of Life:

Although Virgie can absorb Miss Eckhart's gift of the Beethoven, she must at the same time believe equally in the Medusa as much as she believes in Perseus [...] The attempt to include both the Medusa and Perseus is a constant struggle; it means accepting Beethoven- the creative artist, the lost brother/lover and the dragon's blood- the vaunting hero's attack. (258)

Illuminated by this artistic vision and her decision to leave the past behind, Virgie starts to feel the drops of virgin rain, the rain of rebirth and fertility. In order to attain such a state of rebirth the Morgana people must kill the dragons inside themselves, because love resides in horror in the same way hope resides in despair. The Morgana people can only attain the golden and the silver apples if they rid themselves of the anachronistic heritage of King MacLain, leave the past behind, and reconcile themselves with their bodies and nature in the same way Virgie did.

In conclusion, one can assert that Welty's feminine appropriation of classical myths and fairy tales is an important feature of her feminine discourse. Welty, who is familiar with classical mythology and fairy tales, is fully aware of the biased and oppressive masculine claims inherent in such myths and tales. Therefore, as it has been shown in this chapter, Welty usually subverts, reverses and disrupts the masculine narrative in order to maintain a kind of balance in the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. As we have seen, Welty, in The Robber Bridegroom, appropriates the myth of Psyche and Cupid in a way that shows the necessity of having harmony in the relationship between men and women because such harmony will lead to rebirth and regeneration in society.

Also, in appropriating tales such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Rapunzel,” and “The Robber Bridegroom,” Welty subverts the masculine motifs of such tales. In this sense, Rosamond is no longer the naïve fairy tale heroine, but rather the one who refuses to play the role of the helpless victim. Instead, Rosamond strives to assert her identity and develop herself as an independent individual who is able to establish a healthy relationship with the other sex. By her skills and strongly developed character, Rosamond succeeds in assisting Jamie by transforming him from a bandit into a responsible and respectable husband and father. Furthermore, by her subversion of the masculine narrative of the fairy tales, Welty debunks the false masculine assumptions about the value of stepmothers’ wickedness in the maturation process of young girls. Welty, instead, shows how the relationship with the mother figure is very important in the development of daughters. She also shows the need for women to redefine themselves by writing the script of their stories.

Similarly, in The Golden Apples, Welty appropriates classical myths such as Zeus, Leda and the Swan, and Perseus and Medusa. In her feminine appropriation of such myths, Welty reveals the weakness and the confusion of the oppressive masculine power if it persists in repressing the feminine aspect. In the stories of Snowdie and Mattie Will, Welty subverts the masculine narrative by showing how the emergent female power can resist the oppressive MacLainian power. Furthermore, Welty anticipates women’s resistance to the masculine script of the rape victim. Mattie Will, for instance, does not play that role, but she insists on her role as the subject of her story. Welty also shows

how MacLainian power will turn upon itself and become destructive to men such as MacLain himself, his two sons, Loch, and other men in Morgana. In this sense, the failure of Ran and Eugene is an example of the deterioration of masculinity. Welty, however, does not dismiss masculinity as an important factor in any process of rebirth. Easter's resurrection reflects the importance of the masculine presence; Ran should be there in order to witness the resurrection process. This sense of rebirth is further reinforced by Virgie the artist. Virgie, who equally believes in Perseus and the Medusa, is an example of a woman who fights against the restrictions of the masculine society; she refuses to play the role of the decapitated Medusa; therefore, she has a better vision of life and stronger hope than the other wanderers in The Golden Apples. Virgie has become a model of the free woman who leaves the past behind and looks toward the future. Yet, in her freedom and the relationship between her body and nature, Virgie has become the embodiment of hope and rebirth for all Morganians.

Notes

^v Snowdie is portrayed as the “Earth Mother”, the first part of the Triple goddess. For further illustration of the Triple goddess myth, see Rebecca Marks, The Dragon’s Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty’s The Golden Apples, 38, 39, 70.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMAN'S TIME IN WELTY'S DELTA WEDDING

In the final stanza of her famous poem, "Giving Back the Flower," Sarah Piatt has her female persona utter the following words:

So take back your flower, I tell you — of its sweetness I now have no
need;

Yes, take back your flower down into the stillness and mystery to keep;

When you wake I will take it, and God, then, perhaps will witness indeed,

But go, now, and tell Death he must watch you, and not let you walk in
your sleep. (237)

In giving back the flower to her dead lover, the persona declares her rejection of the oppressive world of the past; she rejects the historical time, the time of vaunting heroism and false chivalric values. Being aware of the limitations and oppression of the past, the persona decides to leave this world behind and aspire for the eternal future when justice will be served and God will be her witness. In fact, this aspiration for the future is a characteristic feature of woman's time.

According to Julia Krestiva, this future world is opposed to historical time because it functions on the norm of "temporal modality" whereby the oppressed can recognize themselves by escaping the oppression and the limitation of man's historical time into "cyclical or monumental time." Krestiva argues that these two types of temporality are "traditionally linked to female subjectivity [...] this repetition and this eternity are found to be fundamental, if not the sole,

conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones" (473). This type of woman's time is seen as an antonym of historical time whose linearity renders "a rupture, an expectation, or anguish which other temporalities work to conceal" (473).

Indeed, Welty's concept of time is compatible with Julia Kristeva's. In her fiction, Welty subverts the linearity of masculine time in different ways. First, the narrative is always cyclical; it mainly depends on the memory of her female characters who never commit themselves to any chronological order of narration. It is also cyclical because the narrative involves much repetition and, most often, revolves around one incident. Second and as it has been shown in Chapter Two, most of Welty's female heroines have mythical associations; they are always associated with the myth of rebirth and eternal return. Female characters such as Virgie in The Golden Apples, Gloria in Losing Battles, Rosamond in The Robber Bridegroom, Ellen in Delta Wedding, and Livvie in "Livvie," are all associated with the Persephone figure, the goddess of rebirth and fertility in Greek mythology. Third, Welty's heroines are always linked with the future. Most of these heroines are conscious of the atrocities of the past; therefore, they are always adamant in their rejection of this past. They, however, do not resign themselves to despair but rather maintain hope in the world of the future. In The Optimist's Daughter, for instance, Laurel Hand finally decides to get rid of the idealized past by leaving her mother's breadboard to her stepmother, Wanda Fay. Laurel, in turn, seeks to pursue her future life in Chicago as a fabric designer. Similarly, Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples is aware of the

masculine values of the past in Morgana; therefore, it is no wonder to see her at the end giving away all that her mother had left her. In doing so, Virgie aspires to the world of the future, a world where she can recognize herself as a creative artist. Also, in Losing Battles, Gloria does not see in man's historical time any chance of her advancement, so she, against the wishes of the Renfros and the Beechams, decides to leave Banner in order to live along with her family a much better and promising life. In Delta Wedding, Welty uses all the above mentioned techniques in order to disrupt man's historical time and show that maternal time is the only alternative for rebirth and fertility in society. In order to discuss Welty's concept of woman's time in Delta Wedding, it will be useful to shed some light on the masculine nature of the Fairchild society.

In Delta Wedding, the Fairchilds represent a masculine society that lives the present by the code of the past. The Fairchilds have a history of heroism to which they strongly adhere in their present life; most of the Fairchild men are seen, at least by women, as glorious heroes. The portraits of great-grand fathers hang on their walls. The Fairchild women, mainly the aunts, feel proud of the heroic history of the family, and especially Aunt Tempe does not stop bragging about the chivalric achievements of the Fairchild men: "That was Somebody's gun—he had killed twelve bears every Saturday with it. And Somebody's pistol in the lady's work box; he had killed a man with it" (130). The Fairchilds see Denis as a symbol of the family's history of heroism. Denis is the one who "looked like a Greek god, Denis who squandered his life loving people too much" (152). Even though he was killed in the war many years ago, Denis still lives in

the memory of the Fairchilds as the man who sacrificed his life in defending the honor of his family. But because the family lives by the myth of the hero, George replaces Denis as the new hero of the Fairchilds. Susan Donaldson comments on the masculine legacy of the Fairchilds and their obsession with the hero myth:

The family's concern is fueled in part by hero worship, for George and his fellow Fairchild men are considered actors in history, inhabitants of the public arena, and their masculine legacy is that of a long line of Fairchild men killed in momentous events—ambushes, wars, fires and duels. In this family men alone are considered historical agents, and the general assumption of the family is that the very presence of men like George, Denis, or Battle will attract events of portent. (4)

Laura McRaven, who comes to spend a few days with her mother's relatives, the Fairchilds, observes with much dismay the masculine nature of the Delta society; she is horrified by the fact that it is the men and the boys who reinforce the Fairchild identity: "The boys were only like all the Fairchilds, but it was the boys and the men that defined that family always. All the girls knew it" (16).

To perpetuate their history of masculine heroism, the Fairchild people have entrapped the past in their lives in a very ambivalent manner. Even though they are obsessed with the past, they do not admit it, because for them, the past means pain and separation, two things they are not willing to accept. The third person narrator observes how the Fairchilds are obsessed with the present moment: "They were never too busy for anything, they were generously and almost seriously of the moment: the past (even Laura's arrival today was past

now) was a private dull matter that would be forgotten by the Fairchild aunts”

(17). Laura observes how some of the Fairchilds do not admit death; they do not discriminate between the living and the dead. Laura notices that “even the dead and the living for Aunt Shannon—were alike—no gap opened between them” (16).

To counteract the assumptions embedded in the masculine narrative and question the patriarchal values of the Fairchilds, Welty has recourse to narrative techniques that render time cyclical, thereby producing a pattern that sustains connection rather than rupture and continuity instead of discontinuity. One of these narrative techniques is Welty’s subtle employment of memory as a narrative strategy, a strategy that disrupts the patrilinear and chronological order of masculine narrative. Accordingly, Laura McRaven, a nine-year sojourner, comes to Shellmound for the wedding of her cousin Dabney. As a keen observer of the Delta world, Laura soon realizes that there is something wrong with the Fairchild way of life; it is a masculine society which is mainly defined by boys and men. Laura, the motherless child, tries to seek love in this closed society, but she becomes greatly disappointed when she finds no place among them. She realizes that the Fairchilds have shielded themselves with a love which is difficult to penetrate. Being disappointed about her exclusion, Laura retreats to her memory; it is then she remembers what her mother once told her about the Fairchilds: “Laura from her earliest memory had heard how they ‘never seemed to change.’ That was the way her mother, who had been away from them down

in Jackson where they would be hard to believe, could brag on them without seeming” (17-18).

Illuminated by her mother’s memory and point of view, Laura’s intuitive skills are enhanced; she soon realizes that “the outside did not change, but the inside did; an iridescent life was busy within and under each likeness” (18). In this sense, Laura’s timeless connection with her mother enables her to have a prophetic vision of the imminent change in the Fairchild world. Laura, however, is aware that such a change is unlikely to occur unless the Fairchilds change their attitude toward death and pain. It is as if Laura knows that what ails the Fairchilds is their inability to accept tragedy. Amidst Dabney’s wedding preparations, Laura bitterly blames herself for not being able to grieve over her mother. Laura, argues Harrison, “finds her grieving thwarted by the Fairchild attitude toward death” (33). The narrator, whose voice conflates with Laura’s, questions

Why couldn’t she think of the death of her mother? When the Fairchilds spoke easily of Annie Laurie, it shattered her thoughts like a stone in the bayou. How could this be? When people were at Shellmound it was as if they had never been anywhere else. It must be that she herself was the only one to struggle against this. (175)

Laura feels the strong need to come to terms with feelings of loss and pain in order to recover the love of her mother; it is the love by which she feels superior to anybody among the Fairchilds. With this unique awareness of the loss and pain of the past, Laura remembers her mother racing with time in order to make

for her the doll Marmion: "It was a race between the creation of the doll and the bursting of a storm" (305-06). Laurel's connection with her mother through memory marks the creation of the doll as well as the creation of the new artist:

Laura leaned on her mother's long, soft knee, with her chin in her palm, entirely charmed by the drawing of the face. She could draw better than her mother could and the inferiority of the drawing, the slowly produced wildness of the unlevel eyes, the nose like a ditto mark, and the straight-line mouth with its slow, final additions of curves at the end, bringing at maddening delay a kind of smile, were like magic to watch. (306)

It is through this maternal connection which is brought about by memory that creativity and rebirth are possible. Through this connection, Laura, the burgeoning artist, feels that she is truly superior to others, those who are still entangled in the snares of the patriarchal society of the Fairchilds.

Similarly, Ellen, the mother of most of the Fairchilds, is linked to her own mother through memory. Like Laura, Ellen is an outsider; she was a teacher in Virginia when she married into the Fairchilds. Ellen is also conscious of the insular and patriarchal Fairchild world; she knows that the Fairchild people are obsessed with their sense of collectiveness to the extent that they become unconscious of each other. However, Ellen, like Laura, anticipates some change in the Fairchild society; she feels the rebellious spirit in some of the Fairchild individuals. The narrator speculates about the difference between the wishes of George and those of Ellen: "He was too good. He would not wish them any way but the way they were. But she, herself wished they could all be a little different

on occasion, more aware of one another when they were all so close" (156).

Even though Ellen tries to adapt herself to the Fairchild world, she still retains her Virginian spirit and identity: " Ellen had come far, had yielded to much, for a Virginian, but still now a crowd, a room full of people, was not her natural habitat, a plantation was not her home" (251). Being an outsider, Ellen can only feel her importance when she is connected with her mother. Again, the daughter's memory of her mother brings about a feeling of superiority. Ellen remembers how her mother came from Virginia to witness the birth of her eldest daughter Shelly. Ellen remembers with pride how her mother did her best to keep Dr. Murdoch in the house during the time of delivery:

So Mama was up when I called her, it was before day, and sent and got Dr. Murdoch. The Fairchilds turned out to be late getting there, or could not come—Aunt Mac was sick and Aunt Shannon, who was the busiest woman in the world then, had to be waiting on her hand and foot, and Primrose and Jim Allen were still out at a dance.(282-83)

It is interesting to notice how the presence of Ellen's mother marks the birth of Shelly, the rebellious artist. Again, the connection with the mother figure is seen as a time of rebirth and regeneration.

Another narrative technique Welty uses in Delta Wedding to distort masculine narrative is the fragmented point of view. According to Michael Kreyling, this technique was inspired by Virginia Woolf, and Welty uses it instead of the unified and consistent point of view which governs the narration in realistic fiction. In fact, Welty uses this technique in order to avoid the chronological order

of historical time which, as Kreyling points out, depends on cause and effect (80). In her comparison between Woolf's To the Lighthouse and Welty's Delta Wedding, Suzan Harrison argues that in both novels the fragmented point of view is meant to distort unity in masculine narrative; Harrison asserts that the "narrative voice is fragmented; the narrative authority is thereby decentered in a way that challenges the patriarchal insistence on unity and identity" (35). It is not surprising, therefore, to find Welty distributing the point of view among female characters such as Laura, India, Dabney, Shelly, Robbie and Ellen. In this sense, Kreyling argues that the omniscient point of view "spends less time actually telling the story than orchestrating the telling by several female presences" (83-84). By adopting such a narrative strategy, Welty renders actions meaningless, because, as Jon Hardy puts it, "it is not the actions, but the reactions which are to count" (33). It is true that the time span of the action in the novel covers a ten-day period, a week for the wedding and three days for the picnic. None of the actions, however, is as important as the attitudes of the female characters toward them. Dabney's marriage to Troy, for instance, is carried out in few words: "Mr. Rondo married Dabney and Troy" (282). Therefore, it is not the action but the attitude toward the action that matters. Dabney, for example, sees her wedding as a chance to free herself from the Fairchild patriarchal society. Shelly, however, finds her sister's marriage to Troy an extension of the masculine values; for her, Troy is a man who imitates other men, and men "were no better than children" (259). Ellen, the mother, sees the marriage as a link in a cycle that will later include her other daughters. Robbie, in

turn, sees Dabney's marriage as a precedent which will confirm and justify her marriage to George, because in accepting Troy, the Fairchilds will likely renounce their objection to her own marriage. Laura finds in Dabney's wedding a chance to come to terms with her loss and pain and finally recover the love of her dead mother. With all these different attitudes toward Dabney's wedding, the action is rendered as a timeless event. Accordingly, it is not linear time that gives unity but rather the multiple feminine points of view that see the wedding as a universal phenomenon to be meditated upon without being constrained to historical time.

Another example in which the historical is distorted by the fragmented point of view is the Yellow Dog incident; it is the trestle incident which involves George and Maureen. In this incident, George put his life at risk in order to protect Maureen from being hit by the Yellow Dog. Fortunately, the train stopped before hitting both of them. So far, the incident has been seen by the Fairchild Aunts as an act of heroism in which George showed his readiness to sacrifice himself for the sake of Maureen, a mentally retarded Fairchild. Again, this incident is not as important as an act, but rather as a trigger for many reactions revealed by the fragmented point of view. For Ellen, this incident stands for George's efforts to make the Fairchilds avoid a family tragedy. For Dabney, the incident, as argued by Harrison, is "a prelude to her engagement, the dramatic event that precipitates Troy Falvin's proposal" (37). The incident has made Dabney realize that George has a soft heart; therefore, he will not be a hindrance to her marriage to Troy. Shelly, again, sees in this incident an attempt to

perpetuate the chivalric values in which the hero does his best to save the damsel who, in turn, resists such vaunting attempts. India, Ellen's nine year- old daughter, interprets the incident in a very imaginative way. Kreyling claims that India finds the story a silent melodramatic move "in which the villain ties the heroine to the railroad track as the puffing locomotive bears down" (89-90). Robbie Reid, George's estranged wife, interprets the incident as an act of betrayal on George's part; she is upset with her husband. For her, George's behavior at the trestle represents only false heroism, heroism in which the hero sacrifices his life to maintain an illusive family myth at the expense of his individual identity and responsibility toward his wife who truly loves him. It is no wonder, then, to hear Robbie complaining to George: "You did not do that for me" (116). Again, with all these different interpretations of the trestle incident, Welty destabilizes the masculine narrative of the Fairchild saga. The fragmented point of view has stripped the story of its linear time and its thematic unity, a unity which has been sustained in the original story; in other words, the story has been displaced in time and, in effect, lost its coherence.

As for coherence and thematic unity, Welty, in Delta Wedding, uses another narrative strategy to destabilize historical time and at the same time achieve coherence and thematic unity via repetition and cycling. Kreyling sheds light on Welty's use of cycling and repetition as a narrative strategy to distort man's time: "Welty moved peremptorily, in writing Delta Wedding, not to eliminate history entirely but to destabilize it, thus marginalizing the males for whom history is the arena of meaning and power, and opening room for women

who are traditionally shut out of public action" (87). Indeed, Welty intends to suspend the motion of historical time, and, by choosing a year devoid of any historical event, Welty frees her narrative from the constraints of man's time. Accordingly, the misstriking clocks are mere innuendoes that historical time is irrelevant to her narrative. There are many instances in which the clock strikes the wrong time. For example, toward the beginning of the novel, the narrator alludes to distorted time: "Then Aunt Ellen came in, immediately, as the hall clock finished striking two which meant it was eight" (24). Another example is shown when the family gathers in the parlor for the rehearsal supper; we hear "the clock was striking one, which meant seven" (237). Therefore, while dismissing linear time as an element of unity in her narrative, Welty, in the meantime, hints at another type of temporality; it is a type which sustains its continuity by its repetitive patterns. Towards the end of the novel, Welty shows how Ellen is self-assured by the patterns of repetition in nature:

Ellen at Battle's side rode looking ahead, they were comfortable and silent, both with their great weight, breathing a little heavily in a rhythm that brought them sometimes together. The repeating fields, the repeating cycles of seasons and her own life—there was something in the monotony itself that was beautiful, rewarding— [...] perhaps to what was womanly inside her. Well one moment told you the great things; one moment was enough for you to know the greatest thing. (316-17)

It's a moment of real epiphany, a moment in which Ellen feels herself as a part of the natural order; it is the order which sustains its permanence by its repetitive

and rhythmic pattern. It is not surprising, then, to see Welty adopting such a pattern of cycling and repetition as a narrative strategy that will achieve coherence and thematic unity in her narrative.

In fact, such patterns of repetition and cycling pervade the novel to the extent that they become distinct examples of foregrounding. For example, the marriage of Dabney and Troy is a repetition of the marriage between Robbie and George. Troy, like Robbie, is seen by the Fairchilds as an outsider who disrupts the family's closed circle. Also, there is a repetition in the Fairchilds' given names; the names George, Battle, and Denis are repeated throughout the successive generations. This repetition in naming is cleverly juxtaposed with the repeated pregnancy of Ellen; she is pregnant for the tenth time, and, if she gives birth to a boy, the Fairchilds will name him Denis. This juxtaposition shows how manmade naming can be reinforced only by natural repetition of which Ellen is the representative. There is also repetition in the music played by Dabney's friend, Mary Lamer. The repetitive patterns of Lamer's music are reminiscent of the music played by Cassie Morrison and Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples. The fact that music, like nature, depends on patterns of repetition, is an implication that there is something ephemeral about it.

However, the most repeated pattern in Delta Wedding is the Yellow Dog episode; it is repeated or alluded to more than ten times. What is interesting about the repetition of this episode is the manner in which each of the narrators tells the story of the trestle incident. For instance, Orrin, Battle's and Ellen's son,

tells the story in a very realistic manner; he sticks to the chronological order of events in addition to the place of the action. Orrin's story runs as follows:

The whole family but Papa and Mama, and ten or twenty Negroes with us, went fishing in Drowning Lake. It will be two weeks ago Sunday. And so coming home we walked the track. We were tired—we were singing. On the trestle Maureen danced and caught her foot. I've done that, but I know how to get loose. Uncle George kneeled down and went to work on Maureen's foot, and the train came. He hadn't got Maureen's foot loose, so he didn't jump either. The rest of us did jump, and the Dog stopped, just before it hit them and ground them to pieces. (23)

It is clear that Orrin sticks to facts, as his description is external and does not involve any feelings or emotions; in addition, the climax is abruptly reached. However, when the story is told from a feminine perspective, we observe radical changes in the narrative modes; there is a departure from the linear order of events and the narrative becomes less factual. For instance, India narrates the story in the following way:

Everybody wanted to walk it but Robbie said No. No indeed, she had city heels and would never go on the trestle. [. . .] We started across. Then Shelly couldn't walk either. She is supposed to be such a tomboy! And everybody knows there isn't any water in Dry Creek in the summertime. [...] Well, Shelly went down the bank and walked through it. I was singing a song I know. "I'll measure my love to show you, I'll measure my love to show you" [. . .] Then Shelly said 'look! Look!' and she yelled like a

banshee and the Yellow Dog was coming creep-creep down the track with a flag on it. (76)

It is clear that India's narration is much more emotional than Orrin's. There is also a movement from external to internal; the attitudes of the female characters involved in the incident are explicitly shown; moreover, India's story is much more dramatic and evocative than Orrin's.

Later, when the story is narrated by Shelly and Robbie, the narrative starts to acquire a psychological aspect; the inner feelings of the women become the focus of the narration. The omniscient narrator, whose voice conflates with Shelly's, says

The scene was so familiar as to be almost indelible in Shelly's head, for her memory arrested the action and let her see it again and again, like a painting in a schoolroom, with clouds vivid and thunderclouded, George and Maureen above looked together, and the others below with a shadow of the trestle on them. [. . .] Shelly knew what happened next, but the greatest pressure of easiness let her go after the moment, as if the rest were a feat, a trick that would not work twice [...] But Shelly's deepest easiness came from Robbie's first words, " You didn't do this for me."

(114-16)

It is evident that Shelly's version of the Yellow Dog episode is governed by a feminine consciousness, a consciousness that has the ability of internalizing what has so far been taken for granted as a myth of masculine heroism. In this act of internalization, linear time loses its meaning and, instead, a new rhythmic

and artistic pattern is created; it is a pattern which enables Shelly to question the absurdity of the Fairchild saga. Kreyling comments on Shelly's version as a decentering tool that has rendered the masculine narrative insignificant: "What should, must, be a readable lesson in heroism and blessings on the Fairchild, is in fact an absurdist counter-drama in which the damsel rejects the savior and in so doing saves both herself and the savior from a fate that has already ceased to threaten either one" (91).

In fact, the Yellow Dog incident is further repeated and recycled by many female characters, mainly Robbie Reid and Ellen Fairchild. With each repetition and recycling, the story acquires a new feminine perspective and becomes far removed from its masculine codes. As space precludes further discussion of more versions of this and other incidents, it is convenient at this juncture to move to another pattern of repetition and cycling: Welty's use of mythical temporality, a temporality which she always associates with women.

In Delta Wedding, man's historical time is virtually absent; there are no historical events to disrupt the narrative. Paradoxically, historical time is present through the destructive effects it has inflicted on the Fairchilds. Because of previous wars, the Fairchild family is at the risk of extinction. Many Fairchild men have been killed in World War One, and among those killed is Denis, the mythic hero of the Fairchilds. Denis's tragedy, however, is not limited to the loss of an individual but it extends to his own small family. His family is broken up; his wife, Virgie Lee, is an outcast and his daughter Maureen is mentally retarded. Denis's brother, George, survived the war but is psychologically and emotionally

wounded; he is traumatized by the horror of the war. George's small family is about to break up, as his wife Robbie leaves him because of his behavior on the trestle. To counter such a destructive world of masculine heroism, Welty, Westling argues, uses pastoral hymns and feminine fertility myth as an "alternative to the destructive, life-destroying masculine ideal of warfare that has figured so prominently in literary tradition since Homer's *Iliad*." (87). In Delta Wedding, however, Welty's use of pastoral should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to substitute the pastoral world for a real one; the pastoral world *per se* is not a solution for the people in the Delta; it is, as Harrison argues, a fragile world which is threatened by the external world (29). In fact, in using the pastoral motifs and feminine fertility myth, Welty only substitutes for man's historical time another type of temporality; it is a temporality which is cyclical and in constant renewal. In adopting such a temporality, Welty hopes to reinitiate society through a natural regenerative spirit. In this respect, Westling argues that Welty believes in the cleansing power of this regenerative spirit; therefore, she cleverly associates this rhythmic pattern of renewal with femininity:

Delta Wedding is a timeless garden centered on the cycles of nature and the feminine which Ellen Fairchild embodies as a mother of the family.

Welty emphasizes the close link between the natural world and the feminine experience in a description of Ellen's thoughts as she rides in a wagon with her husband near the end of the novel. (88-89)

As a result, Welty changes the landscape of the masculine narrative into a feminine one; the pastoral world of the Delta is dominated by women, and at the

center of this world is Ellen. Ellen, however, is not an idle nymph as is the case in classical pastoral^v, but she is a busy woman who cooks and provides food for all the family. Moreover, she encourages courtship and promotes marriage. Her obsession with the preparation of Dabney's wedding and, at the same time, her concerns for her elder daughter, Shelly, and her sister-in-law, Robbie, show how Ellen is interested in promoting fertility in the Delta world. Ellen exerts tremendous efforts to reconcile Robbie to George; her frequent intercession for the sake of reuniting the two makes Aunt Tempe accuse her of being biased in favor to Robbie: "Whose side are you on?" (140). To this Ellen replies: "I am on George's side! And Dabney's side . . . George is the sweetest boy in the world but I think it's up to Robbie" (140). In fact, Ellen sees George's and Robbie's reunion as a prelude to the marriage between Dabney and Troy. However, as Hardy argues, what seems to be a private matter might be ritualistic: "The lives, the thoughts, of all the characters are intensely private—but because they are ritualistic too, and ritual is always inevitable, they fall into patterns which transcend privacy. [. . .] And, if the characters themselves are not often conscious of the pattern, the author is conscious of it" (36). These remarks give insight into Welty's deliberate use of pastoral motifs in rituals that connect the natural with the human; in this sense, Ellen's effort to reconcile Robbie and George is part of universal feminine rituals of rebirth and eternal return. It is, then, this eternal time with which Welty wants to associate her female characters.

Similarly, Welty's allusions to classical myths of feminine fertility are an attempt to reinitiate the Delta society into a continuous mythical cycle in which

the feminine and masculine power is in harmony. In fact, in Delta Wedding, Welty makes many references to the Indian cult of rebirth as well as the archetypal myth of Demeter and Kore. Westling speculates that Welty must have known about the Choctaws who inherited the mounds built by the Indians of the middle Mississippi civilization. Those Choctaws, Westling observes, believe that one of these mounds belongs to “the Great Mother and regard it as the birthplace of their race” (72). The mound cult is also deeply rooted in the Germanic fertility myth; Freja, the goddess of fertility, used to live in a grave^v. Welty, then makes reference to mounds as places where fertility is initiated. The first meeting between Dabney and Troy is associated with a mound: “There was a distance where he charmed her most — it was strange. Just here, coming now to the Indian mound, was where she really noticed him last summer, riding like this with India on Junie and Rob” (38). The association of Dabney and Troy with the Indian mound is a hint of the revival process which will be brought about by their imminent marriage. However, and as mentioned earlier, this marriage will not be affirmed unless Robbie is reunited with George. The fact that George lives in *Shellmound* (my italics) seems to reinforce the assumption that he is connected with the mound cult. In this sense, Welty suggests that George’s reunion with Robbie is an inevitable step towards a total rebirth in the Delta, a rebirth in which the repetition of the feminine presence is a guarantee of its continuity. Accordingly, Welty sees women’s time as a chain within a chain in a never ending cycle of rebirth.

Another myth Welty draws on heavily in Delta Wedding is the myth of Demeter and Kore. There are many instances in which Ellen Fairchild is compared to Demeter, the Earth Mother. Ellen is a caring mother, who is interested in the welfare of her eight daughters as well as her surrogate daughters, Laura and Robbie. The reference to Ellen as being the mother of all is made when she meets the mysterious and beautiful girl in the woods. Ellen is overwhelmed by the beauty of the girl to the extent that all her motherly feelings are directed toward the girl; she looked at the girl and “felt sometime like a mother to the world” (91). Later, when this girl is ravished by George and killed by the Yellow Dog, Ellen mourns her as when Demeter mourned the disappearance of Persephone. George’s sexual adventure with the lost girl has aggravated Ellen and made her fear for “the whole family.” Yet, when Ellen sees regret in George’s eyes, she feels stronger than before that George should be reunited with his Robbie. Therefore, Ellen, in conjunction with Partheny, continually intercedes to bring Robbie and George together. Besides the cake she prepares, she asks Partheny to prepare a patticake for George to eat in order to restore his love for Robbie. Partheny, however, prepares two patticakes, one for George and the other for Dabney. Partheny tells India: “Mr. George got to eat this patticake all alone, got to bed himse’f, and his love won’t have no res’ till her come back to him [...] I goin’ bring Miss Dab heart-shape patticake of her own—come de time” (172). Indeed, the cooperation between Ellen and Partheny recalls the myth of Demeter and Hecate. Like Hecate, Partheny nurses Ellen’s eight daughters and does her best to make Dabney’s wedding succeed.

The reference to Ellen as the Demeter figure is further reinforced when her daughters are often seen playing in the meadows. Just before meeting Troy, Dabney and India are described as maidens riding in the fields: "They rode through the Fairchilds and into the pasture where three mules were looking out together from a green glade. The sedge was glowing, the round meadow had a bloom like fruit and the sweet gums were like a soft curtain beyond, fading into the pink of the near sky"(40). Certainly, the scene evokes the place and the circumstances of Hades' abduction of Persephone. At the same time, the glowing fields recall the meadow where Dionysus, the god of joy, lives. By this double association, Welty, as Westling argues, wants to reflect the paradoxical nature of Troy; he is both an abductor and a liberator (81-82). When India first sees Troy, she describes him as "a black wedge in the lighted wind" (68). Yet, when Troy comes and brings Dabney his mother's quilt, he is like Dionysus associated with light: "His foxy skin turned rosy with pleasure and his thick lashes growing in light- red brunches and points gave him a luxuriant, petlike look" (132). In this sense, Troy is reminiscent of Cash in "Livvie"; he has the qualities of both Hades and Dionysus.

Similarly, George Fairchild is portrayed as a mythical hero of double qualities. Like Hades, he is an abductor and rapist; his sexual adventure with the nymph-like girl in the woods shows how dangerous he is. However, George has many of the Dionysian attributes; he is always the center of attention for the Fairchild women; he is nearly worshiped by them. Ellen always praises his charm and sees in him the qualities of a Greek god; Ellen muses: "Yet in the

same moment for her eyes, he stood with his shirt torn back and his shoulders as bare (she thought in a cliché of her girlhood) as a Greek god's, his hair on his forehead as if he were intoxicated, unconscious caught there, looking joyous" (218). There are also many references to George as a Dionysian figure; the scene at the Yazoo River reflects his joyous spirit when he and Robbie play in the water.

In fact, Delta Wedding is full of allusions to classical mythology^v, mainly the feminine fertility myths, but as the focus here is on Welty's perception of time, it seems relevant to shed more light on the relation between such myths and Welty's concept of feminine time. In this respect, Welty sees the temporality of feminine time as a reflection of the eternal renewal in nature; it is a temporality which is perpetuated by its repetitive patterns. The continual efforts of Demeter and Hecate to bring Persephone out from the underworld in order to bring about fertility are systematically equated with Ellen's efforts to sustain marriage and courtship in Shellmound. Therefore, it is no wonder to see Ellen self-assured when she observes the rhythmic repetition in the natural world; she feels the same patterns inside her. In this sense, the use of the present participle in the 'repeating field', the 'repeating cycles of seasons', and the 'rewarding' beauty is what particularly appeals to Ellen. Ellen, who is portrayed as the 'Great Mother,' sees herself as part of the cycle of eternal return. Ellen's relentless efforts to bring a harmony between the feminine and masculine in the Delta world are motivated by her belief in the regenerative spirit of the feminine world; it is a spirit which is conveyed from mothers to daughters as long as men breathe. It is

remarkable to notice that when Ellen has completed her mission of matchmaking, she does not rest, but she goes to water the plants in her garden. The bodings of rebirth in the Fairchild society are anticipated by revival in nature: "The night insects all over the Delta were noisy, a kind of audible, twinkling like a lowly star light, pervaded the night with a gregarious radiance" (316). The imminent rebirth in the Fairchilds is a sign of a better future life for all the Delta people.

Concerning women's aspirations for the future, Delta Wedding is full of examples of female characters who are aware of their loss and pain in the past, the limitations and the oppression of the present, and the promise of the future. Laura McRaven, Robbie Reid and the Fairchild sisters, mainly Dabney and Shelly, are all females who look forward to the future, because in the future lies the possibility of freedom and self-realization. In this respect, it is relevant to quote Werner Heisenberg's definition of the terms *past* and *present*. Jennifer Randisi cites Heisenberg defining the terms in this way: "When we use the term 'past', we comprise all those events which we could know at least in principle, about which we could have heard at least in principle. In a similar manner, we comprise by the term 'future' all those events which we could try to change or to prevent at least in principle" (36). In light of this definition, the female characters in Delta Wedding perceive the future as a time when they can prevent atrocities of the past from happening again and change the cruelty and the oppression of the present into a promise of a better life in the future.

For example, Laura, a nine-year old girl, is a relative of the Fairchilds; her mother is Annie Laurie, a Fairchild who recently died. The motherless daughter

lives with her father in Jackson. The action of Delta Wedding unfolds with Laura coming to visit her Fairchild relatives in Shellmound and attending the Wedding of her cousin Dabney. Laura hopes that her visit will help her come to terms with the pain and loss inflicted upon her by the past. However, on arriving at the Delta, Laura is surprised to observe that the Delta people are unconscious of her presence. She becomes further surprised and embittered when she realizes that the Fairchilds are oblivious to her mother's death. For them, the death of Annie Laurie is merely an event which they use for a calendar purpose; they date things either before or after Aunt Annie Laurie's death. Laura, who is aware of her loss and pain, still remembers her mother. Memory, as is the case with Laurel Hand in The Optimist's Daughter, brings the physical image of Laura's mother alive. The present, for Laura, seems as painful as the past; her exclusion by the Fairchilds is a real setback in her search for the lost love. Laura also feels that she and India, as females, are marginalized by the Fairchild masculine society. Laura observes that "it was the boys and the men that defined the family always" (16). Laura's awareness of the past and the present makes her think of the future; it is the future world where she can change the past and the present.

Fortunately, Laura has the potentiality of change. Laura, as Welty hints, has a talent for art; and there are two references to her as a promising artist figure. The first reference is made when Laura is on the train, watching the landscape, the fields, and the trees of the Delta. The narrator speculates "she could draw better than those were" (3). The second reference is made when Laura remembers her mother making her a doll; Laura watches her mother and

the narrator again comments on Laura's potential artistic skill: "she could draw better than her mother could" (306). Laura boasts of her mother's timeless love and imaginative creativity because, Harrison argues, the creation of the doll for Laura "marks the birth of the future out of the past, the birth of freedom out of memory" (33). In fact, in celebrating her mother's creativity, Laura also celebrates her own artistic skill. Accordingly, Laura's awareness of the past and the present, in addition to her auspicious artistic skill, makes her decide to leave the world of Shellmound and go back to Jackson to live her future life with her father: "Laura felt in the end she would go—go from all this, go back to her father. She would hold that secret" (313). Therefore, Laura succeeds in reclaiming her mother's artistic inheritance, but will go back to Jackson to pattern her own life in an artistic manner that is certainly different from the past and the present of the Fairchilds. Laura is an artist who, Harrison says, is "the forerunner of several artist figures appearing in Welty's later fiction: Cassie Morrison, Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples, the storytelling women of Losing Battles and Laurel McKelva Hand in The Optimist's Daughter" (47).

Another female character who looks forward to the future is Robbie Reid. Robbie is one of the rebellious women in Delta Wedding. Like Laura, and Ellen, Robbie is an outsider who closely observes the narrowly closed circle of the Fairchilds. Robbie is aware of the pain of the past, and she is conscious of her social position; she still remembers how, out of poverty, she had to work at the Fairchild store in order to sustain herself and her family. Similarly, Robbie is aware of the present; she is conscious of the Fairchild atrocities against her

because she is against the idea that George should be the sacrificial beast of the family. Being the wife of George, the mythical hero of the Fairchilds, Robbie is the focus of attention of the old Fairchild women. After the trestle incident, Robbie gets upset with George's false heroic behavior, so she leaves him. Robbie is bitterly condemned for leaving George; Battle refers to her as a notoriously rebellious woman who is a replica of her sister, Rebel Reid. Battle addresses George: "What's that sister of her's name? Rebel Reid! I bet you anything I've got Robbie's with Rebel," (66). Aunt Tempe considers Robbie's protest as a preposterous and scandalous act; she rages against Robbie: "Nobody has a bit of influence on him at all! But how can she think she's fit to take him down, old Man Swanson's granddaughter? I could pull her eyes out this moment" (140).

Robbie, a dedicated and a loving wife to George, feels it is her duty to protect and save George from the grip of the Fairchilds; her dream is to liberate him and take him away from Shellmound; she wants to have a future life away from the Fairchilds. Robbie, who is aware of the cruelty of the past and the oppression of the present, is relentless in her fight to separate George from the collective love he is indulged in. Robbie's dream is expressed in a style which reflects her strong desire to separate George from the collective love of the Fairchilds:

Nothing was worthy of him but the pure gold, a love that could be simply beside him—her love. Only she could hold him against that grasp, that separating thrust of the Fairchild love that would go on and on persuading

him, comparing him, begging him, crowing over him, slighting him, proving to him, sparing him, comforting him, deceiving him, confessing and yielding to him, tormenting him. (195)

Indeed, it is Robbie's sincere love for George that makes her walk into the heat of the sun in order to face the Fairchilds; she wants to fight and defend herself and George equally. In her confrontation with Aunt Mac, Robbie lifts her voice, saying: "You are all a spoiled, stuck up family that thinks nobody else is really in the world! But they are! You're just one plantation. With a little crazy girl in the family, and listen at Miss Shannon. You're not even rich. You're medium" (215). Jennifer Randisi claims Robbie is the one who "contests the way in which Shellmound is perceived by the Fairchild family.

[. . .] Robbie can respond to Shellmound in this way because its story holds no significance to her" (42-43). Robbie knows that the Fairchilds' problem is the false family myth they have perpetuated about themselves. She feels that George needs her more than he needs the family: "He wanted her so blindly—just to hold. Often Robbie was back at the time where she had first held out her arms, back when he came in the store. Home from war, a lonely man that noticed wildflower. She could not see why he needed to be so desperate! She loved him" (280). Robbie realizes that her task to detach George from the Fairchilds is not easy; there should be a "miracle in the outer world" (248). Robbie, however, has the miracle inside her; it is her love for him. Therefore, it is not strange when we see the couples at Dabney's rehearsal reconciled easily. When George kisses Robbie, she whispers: "But you're everything on earth to

me” (247). George, then, realizes that he needs separateness in love; he decides to give up the false dream of mythical heroism in order to see himself as an independent individual. When later the Fairchilds hold a picnic, it is to “tell Dabney hello and George good-bye” (318). It is understood that George will lead the simple life of a farmer who grows vegetables instead of having the whole plantation. Robbie then succeeds in helping George realize himself and become an independent person. As such, they will have all the potentialities of success in the future.

Another female character who aspires for the future is Dabney Fairchild. Dabney is an example of the newly rebellious Fairchild women; she has a vision of future life that, she hopes, will keep her away from the illusion in which her family lives. A sign of Dabney’s rebellion is her devaluation of her Fairchild identity; Dabney does not see herself as a Fairchild: “Sometimes, Dabney was not sure she was a Fairchild - Sometimes, she did not care, that was it. There were moments of life when it did not matter who she was-even where” (40). Although she knows that Troy Falvin is socially below her, she willingly agrees to his marriage proposal, hoping that this marriage will make her achieve her dream of an independent life. Dabney, however, is conscious of the obstacles that lie ahead of her. She knows that Troy is an outsider and it might be difficult for the Fairchild men, mainly her Uncle George, to accept this marriage. However, through her strong intuition, Dabney comes to know that even though Uncle George seems to be like the Fairchilds, he is actually different from them. Dabney ponders: “Perhaps the heart was always made of different stuff and had

a different life from the rest of the body" (42). Therefore, it is not strange to hear Dabney earlier expressing her wish with a great deal of modality: "Uncle George would be coming today- She would be glad. He would be sweet to her, sweet to Troy" (41). Dabney knows that her decision to marry Troy "would kill her father," yet, because she is rebellious, she feels that the more capricious her father is, the more delightful she becomes. The narrator comments on the defiant attitude of Dabney: "The caprices of his restraining power over his daughters filled her with delight now that she had declared what she could do" (41). When the Fairchilds, against their disposition, show no objection to that marriage, Dabney starts to think of the wedding presents and her future life with Troy: "Papa said any kind of wedding I wanted I could have, if I had to get married at all, so I 'm going to have shepherdess crooks and horsehair ruffed hats" (54). In fact, Dabney's excitement over her marriage preparation is an indication of the quality of the future life she might lead. In this respect, Douglas Messerli argues that

Dabney's marriage preparations represent the beginning of a new time, a time of discovery in which she looks forward into the future, a time which is often represented in Welty's fiction as the time of the dream because it is a time which includes the real and the imagined world, being and becoming and the present and the future all in the same moment; grounded in daily action it is, nonetheless, a time touched with magic; it is the time of "double vision" where one sees a new self growing out of the old" (112)

In fact, Dabney seems indifferent to the old, yet she is not unconscious of it. When she is given the night light which represents the family traditions of the Fairchilds, Dabney does not show much interest in it. John Edward Hardy contends that the night light is a sign of Dabney's rebellion and independence; Hardy argues: "The lamp which the aunts gave to Dabney, a night-light, notably, itself an object of family tradition, but given to Dabney, becoming the prime symbol of her independence, her private rebellion of indifference when she carelessly broke it" (80). Messerli, however, argues that Dabney's indifference to the lamp has to do with her incomplete vision of time. According to him, Dabney is conscious of the present and the future only, since the lamp "combines the real and the imagined world, the present and the future as Dabney does in her new happiness. But most importantly, the light should suggest to Dabney something which is missing, the past" (113). In fact, this argument seems to be valid, yet if we assume that the past and the present are conflated in the world of the Fairchilds, we may come to the conclusion that Dabney's vision of time is complete, because she is conscious of the fact that her family lives the present by the codes of the past. In either case, Dabney's vision of time has the potentiality to make her aspire for a different world to transcend the present into the future. In this sense, Dabney is not an escapist, but an individual who looks for separateness and independence.

Being a woman of the future, Dabney rides early in the morning to Marmion, the deserted Fairchild house. This house has been associated with death and fear, so it has been empty since 1890 when its owner, James

Fairchild, was killed in a duel with Ronald McBane. In spite of the fact that the house is associated with fear, Dabney likes it; she is impressed by its beauty which is mirrored in the Yazoo River, so she decides not to give it up to any one. Dabney sees in the house a possibility of a happy life. It is a moment of illumination in which she discovers that a life with Troy in this house is worth more than all the deceptive codes of honor. It is not strange, then, to read: “‘I will never give up anything,’ Dabney thought, bending forward and laying her head against the soft neck. ‘Never – Never! For I am happy, and to give up nothing will prove it. I will never give up anything, never give up Troy—or to Troy’” (159). Dabney only thinks of the future, because in the future lies the hope of recovery and rebirth.

Shelly is another rebellious Fairchild individual who is sensitive to the issue of time. She is aware of the past, but she neither idealizes nor ignores it. Shelly keeps the flowers of last year only to smell them from time to time: “The jars, she had filled with rose leaves and clove pinks the summer before, and now and then, but not often, she still took the stoppers out and smelled their last year’s perfume” (107). Shelly has in her room her collection of gifts and articles such as diamond rings, pins, earrings, Mary Shannon’s cameos etc., but she mentions “she would not be caught dead wearing them” (107). Shelly, therefore, admits the past, but she does not glorify it or totally forget it. She believes that the past affects the present by shaping and defining it. In this sense, Shelly’s perception of the past is different from the perception of her family; therefore, it is not surprising to find her severely critical of the Fairchilds who are collectively

obsessed with the present. Shelly records in her diary: "We never wanted to be smart, one by one, but all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside" (110). Shelly is aware of the problem that ails her family; she understands that their denial of the past makes their present life unreal. In this respect, Messerli argues that

Shelly's comprehension includes more than Dabney's mere acceptance of a modality of time different from her family presentism. Shelly intimates that she comprehends how time affects people, she appears to understand, for example, the connection between the past and present, the way to which one affects the other. (114)

This 'double vision,' as described by Messerli, suggests that Shelly does not have any problem with either the present or the past, but it is the future which worries her.

In fact, Shelly's dread of the future does not mean that she has a negative attitude toward it; on the contrary, she aspires for the future, but first she has to understand it. Shelly does not want the future to be a repetition of either the past or the present. She wants to make sure that the future is not an extension of the chivalric values of the past and the oppression of the present. In this sense, Shelly is skeptical about Troy; she thinks he is an opportunist who may turn out to be like other men. Again, Shelly writes in her diary: "I think I would never love him. [. . .] T. is the one who is always thinking of ways in or ways out, and I think he gets the smell of someone studying" (112). For Shelly, Troy seems to represent the patriarchal and racial values of both the past and the present; she

still remembers her encounter with him when he interceded to disengage the Negroes who were fighting; she still remembers with disgust and dismay his violent ways with the Negroes and his tough behavior when he taunts her: "Shelly, did you come to watch me?" (258). It is then, Shelly decides to leave; however, she has to jump over the blood, because, as Gygas mentions, "she can hardly bear walking through a door on which there is blood" (33).

This encounter has made Shelly understand the real nature of Troy and perhaps other men like him. Shelly, as a woman, feels superior to men, and so the narrator comments on Shelly's triumphant feelings: "Shelly half away smiled, with the sensation that she had only seen a man drunk. The next moment she felt a sharp, panicky triumph. As though the sky had opened and shown her, she could see why Dabney's wedding should be prevented. Nobody could marry a man with blood on his door" (258). It is true that Shelly's encounter is a great disappointment to her, yet as Kreyling argues, Shelly learns "a lesson in the superiority of women, not a lesson in the evil of racial oppression" (196). Accordingly, Shelly's initial apprehension that the future might be an extension of the past and the present can be justified. Shelly will not love or marry in the way her sister does; she believes in love that combats the atrocities of the past and the oppression of the present. Shelly confirms: "I can not think of a way of loving that would not fight the world" (112). It is this love which will make her transcend the limitations of historical time; it is love which does not know separateness. Welty hints at Shelly's ability of transcending into the world of the future through her love of what she records; Shelly is an artist, who has the ability to liberate

herself through her “engagement with language” (Harrison 41). Again, Welty thinks that, through art, women can have better lives in the future.

To conclude, one can assert that Welty’s concept of time in Delta Wedding is typically feminine. Her concept of time is compatible with Krestiva’s in “Woman’s Time.” Welty thinks that man’s linear historical time is characterized by rupture and disconnected temporality. Welty, however, sees that women’s time has to do with a cyclical temporality which is connected with the eternal return. In addition, she thinks that women’s time is monumental; it is the time of the future when women can realize themselves by leading a free life away from the limitations of the past and the oppression of the present. Therefore, Welty, in Delta Wedding distorts historical time and reaffirms women’s time in different ways. On the narrative level, Welty has recourse to memory in order to sustain the maternal and eternal relationship between mothers and daughters. It is through memory that Laura and Ellen are connected with their mothers and, then, both are initiated into an eternal world of creativity and rebirth. Welty also uses the fragmented narrative point of view, in addition to cycling and repetition, in order to decenter the linear time of the masculine and heroic narrative. The repetition of the trestle incident is an example of how the multiple feminine perspectives give a kind of thematic unity to any given story. Furthermore, by associating women with pastoral traditions and fertility myths, Welty shows how the decaying heroic society can only be reborn when it is initiated in the continuously renewed cycle of feminine rebirth. Finally, in having her female characters aspire for the future time as a means whereby they can recognize

themselves as independent individuals, Welty shows a strong belief that the future world is the domain where women can have a life better than the life of the past and present.

Notes

^ For the nymph image in pastoral conventions, see Christopher Marlow's "Passionate Shepard to His Beloved." The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, and Writing, 699.

^ In Scandinavian mythology, Freja is believed to have been the Goddess of Fertility.

^ For more discussion of mythology in Delta Wedding see Westling, Eudora Welty, 85.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WEAVING METAPHOR IN LOSING BATTLES

In her famous poem, "Weaving," Lucy Larcom, a nineteenth century American woman poet, reveals that women's obsession with weaving goes beyond the need for gaining means of subsistence; it has to do with the specificity of women's experience in patriarchal societies. Most importantly, however, weaving is associated with women's artistic creativity:

'I weave, and weave, the livelong day:

The woof is strong, the warp is good:

I weave, to be my mother's stay;

I weave to win my daily food:

But ever as I weave, "saith" she

'The world of women haunteth me.

'The river glides along one thread

In nature's mesh, so beautiful

The stars are woven in; the red

Of sunrise; and the rain-cloud dull

Each seems a separate wonder wrought;

Each blends with some wondrous thought. (115)

Obviously, the final couplet of the second stanza hints at the artistic creativity involved in the act of weaving. The blending of disparate elements of beauty into a neat tapestry is indicative of feminine artistic creativity, a creativity which underlies a genuine “thought”. In this sense, the act of weaving is not perceived as an isolated external act, but rather an imaginative activity whereby women assert themselves by their artistic creation. The weaving together of the disparate elements into a harmonious whole of beauty seems to echo Welty’s technique of weaving different themes into her narrative. It is a technique which challenges the pen-penis metaphor, which according to Gubar, has been perpetuated in the phallocentric writing traditions.

In Losing Battles, Welty has made many references to the art of weaving, quilting and embroidery. For instance, there is a reference to the weaving figure when Welty describes the Beecham house in Banner: “There was not a breath of air. But all the heat- shaped leaves on the big bois d’arc tree by the house were continuously on the spin as if they were hung on threads” (21). Also, Brother Bethune is expected to include in his speech Jack’s welcome and “weave it into the family history” (21). Other references to weaving are made when Ella Fay is seen “threading her way”(26) around Stovall Curly’s store and when Aunt Beck describes Ora Curly’s possessions: “ Her pincushion, her needles and thread and her scissors are all things I have seen her reach out there”(40). There are also many references to quilting and embroidery. Grandma Granny is given a quilt on her ninetieth birthday; Ella Fay has the talent of embroidery: “Everybody knows

she embroiders" (134); Gloria Short and her mother before her are keen on sewing and embroidery.

In fact, such recurrent references to weaving, quilting, and embroidery used by Welty in Losing Battles, have made many critics concentrate on their figurative meanings. For instance, Richard Gray argues that the weaving figure stands for the power of speech in weaving together a pattern whereby the Beechams and the Renfros can survive all difficult circumstances. According to Gray, Welty's use of speech is a "strenuous effort to weave a pattern out of—and, in the end, against—the difficulties, and downright mess, that constitute the basic fabric of these lives" (43).

Gray's argument gives much insight into the ways speech, as opposed to writing, is used by the Beechams and the Renfros as a tactic of survival; they keep talking in order to endure the hardships in life. My argument however, has to do with the authorial design in which Welty employs the weaving metaphor as an indication of her artistic ability; she weaves together conflicting issues into an image of social harmony. These issues are subtly exposed, juxtaposed, and finally reconciled. In this respect, the weaving metaphor is a feature of Welty's feminine discourse in Losing Battles; it is a discourse in which Welty merges the history of people with the history of land, masculine mythical power with feminine wisdom, the individual sense and the communal responsibility, and the idea of kin with that of the outsider. Welty weaves all these conflicting issues into her narrative in a manner that reflects a sense of feminine artistry.

Losing Battles opens with a scene of relentless aridness; it is a scene which reflects the tense relationship between the natural and the human:

When the rooster crowed, the moon had still not left the world but was going down on flushed cheek, one day short of the full. A long thin cloud crossed it slowly, drawing itself out like a name being called. The air changed, as if a mile or so away a wooden door had swung open, and a smell, more of warmth than wet, from a river at low stage, moved upward into the clay hills that stood in darkness. [. . .] The distant point of the ridge, like the tongue of a calf, put its red lick on the sky. Mists, voids, patches of woods and naked clay, flickered like live ashes, pink and blue.

(3-4)

In fact, such gloomy images of drought and dust are used by Welty as a device to foreshadow the disturbing history of the three families assembling at Banner to celebrate Granny's ninetieth birthday; the land is at fault with them because they are at odds with themselves and other people in Banner. The Vaughans, the Renfros and the Beechams make up one large family similar to the Fairchilds in Delta Wedding. Like the Fairchilds, this large family has shielded itself with collective love. The members of this large family sit around Granny Vaughan and tell stories about their history, both past and present, cherishing the fact that Granny's grandfather, Captain Jordan, was the founder of Banner. According to Uncle Curtis, Captain Jordan built the Beecham house; he "perched him here in the thick of the Indians, overlooking the stage road that come threading through the canebrakes up to Tennessee" (180). Bethune, a Baptist preacher and

historian of the Beechams and the Renfros and the Vaughans, speaks with a sense of nostalgia about the past of the three families; he speaks about the abundance of food they used to have: “ We got milk, and butter, and eggs. [. . .] And if we must needs accept them old commodities again from Uncle Sam, come about Christmas time, here’s hoping he will have the preferences of Boone county better in mind than he did last year and leave out his wormy apples”(192).

The fact, however, is that the past was not as golden as Bethune depicts. Through the different stories told at the reunion, we learn that the past was full of catastrophes including floods, the loss of the Renfros’ farm to Dearman, the premature death of Sam Dale — a young admired Beecham —the suicide attempt of Rachael Sojourner, and the memory of Gloria living in an orphanage. The Beechams, the Renfros and the Vaughans gather at the reunion and remember all the unfortunate incidents in the family history. These memories however, as Louise Gosset argues:

[a]re not of lost plantations and slaves, of ancient origins and codes no longer honored, but they have their own guilty consciences and equivocal reconciliation with the past [...] they conserve the values of rural Baptist congregations. They occupy the scruffy hills once almost as densely populated as Yoknapatawpha County. (343)

In addition to this sense of guilt and dislocation they inherited from the past, the Beecham-Renfro clan have many difficulties in the present. We also learn from the stories told at the reunion that the family holds grudges against Stovall Curly, Jude Moody, Julia Mortimer, Dearman and others. We learn that Jack, the

mythical hero of the family, spent almost two years in Parchman, a jail in Ludlow, for his fight with Curly over the family ring. The members of the reunion bitterly condemn Judge Moody because he is the one who sentenced Jack without understanding the real circumstances of the fight. They also speak ill of Julia Mortimer, the Banner school teacher; they criticize her because of her strictness toward them and her efforts to dissuade Gloria from marrying into the Beechams.

With all these memories of the past and the conflict and acrimony of the present, it is not strange to see Welty juxtapose the history of the people and the myth of the land. The frequent scenes of drought and dust are shown by Welty as the reaction of nature to human behavior; nature is at odds with people because people are at odds with each other. Therefore, it is not strange to hear Uncle Nathan complain to Mr. Renfro about the miserable situation they live in: “The spring after Jack went, General Green about took over your corn, remember? [. . .] ‘And today, your whole farm wouldn’t hardly give a weed comfort and sustenance’” (70). Brother Bethune also reflects on the miserable situation in Banner: “I don’t reckon good old Mississippi’s ever being poorer than she is right now, ‘cept when we lost [...] ‘No corn in our cribs, no meal in our barrel, no shoes and no clothing- tra la la la !” (191-92). Banner, instead of corn, is full of snakes; Bethune tells the reunion: “In Stovall’s cornfield, only this morning, I saw a snake so long as it was laying over seven and half hills of corn [...] there was the other one coming, and I stood torn between ‘em, let pair of ‘em get away. There is a lesson in that!” (192-3). Later we learn that brother Bethune killed four hundred and twenty six snakes; according to Uncle Curtis, Brother

Bethune “holds the title of champion snake killer of this entire end of the county” (213). Uncle Dolphus also complains about the performance of the land which seems to be at odds with them: “It is the fault of the land going back on us treating us, the wrong way” (194).

In the face of such miserable circumstances, the people at the reunion hope that the return of Jack Renfro will bring about rebirth in Banner. Uncle Curtis attaches much hope to Jack’s return: “We are relying on Jack now. He’ll haul us out of misery” (194). In fact, the salvation of these people, Welty implies, relies foremost on their reconciling themselves to each other in order to be reconciled with the land and nature. This reconciliation, however, requires forgiveness. In this respect, Karl-Heinz Westarp^v argues that the characters in Losing Battles “have growing awareness of the consequent guilt that lies heavily on them” (60). The Beechams and Renfros are religious people who are conscious of evil and afraid of sin. In connecting the performance of the land and the wrong deeds of the people at Banner, Jennifer Lynn Randisi finds a relationship between the family myth and the myth of the land. Randisi argues that the cycle of rebirth in nature is disrupted by the faulty behavior of human beings: “The land’s cycle is disturbed by those whose lives it determines and thereby brought into historical or linear line. The fate of those who depend upon the land is not only determined by the land’s performance, but also by the myth of that performance as extended over time” (88)^{vi}. In this sense, there is no possibility that the land can regain its myth unless the families at Banner waive

their memories of the past and renounce the grudge they hold against their neighbors.

Welty hints at the possibility of rebirth in Banner in two ways. First, she shows how the mysterious century plant begins its cycle when its flowers die; Miss Lexie observes the dying flowers of the century plant: “yes and those’ll look like wrung chickens’ necks in the morning” (356). In the same night, however, Vaughan, who does not sleep after the reunion is over, is sensually attracted by the blooming of the century plant: “He could smell their sweat—it went against his face as would the moist palm of a hand. Then he saw—the smell must be coming from the flowers. They looked like big clods of the moonlight freshly turned up from this night —almost phosphorescent” (366). Earlier, the mystery of this plant is perceived by Granny when she comments on Miss Beulah’s fear of the blooming plant: “can’t tell a century plant what to do” (18).

The second possibility of rebirth is symbolically hinted at by Moody’s car which is held dangling over the precipice. In spite of its teetering position, the engine keeps running. Seymour L. Gross comments on the symbolic connotations of this car:

“There is something in the universe which does not like a fall- call it the life force or the natural order or whatever. This impulse is most obviously and hilariously caught in the image of the Moodys’ car, which was kept from crashing with its occupants into the ravine by one of Uncle’s Nathan’s religious signs—‘Destruction Is At Hand.’” (121)

This possibility of rebirth looms when Jack Renfro reconciles with Judge Moody and Stovall Curly. Jack, who is told at the reunion that the car he rescued from the ditch on his way back from Parchman belongs to his adversary Judge Moody, goes back to undo his Samaritan deed. However, when he finds that Moody swerved his Buick in order to avoid Lady May and Gloria, he decides to help him rescue his car. He even invites Judge Moody and his wife to join the family reunion. The Moodys, who find themselves stranded in Banner, accept Jack's invitation. However, the appearance of the Moodys disturbs the members of the reunion. When Jack explains what has happened, they reluctantly agree to host Judge Moody and his wife. After much discussion about Judge Moody's role in sending Jack to the penitentiary, the people at the reunion reconcile with the Moodys and let them join the reunion and spend the night. This reconciliation is marked by signs of rebirth in nature; Mr. Renfro tells Jack, "It is raining son" (372). The next day, Jack along with Gloria, Miss Beulah and the Moodys go to rescue the Moodys' Buick. In this rescue, Curly – another former adversary of the Renfros and the Beechams – comes to help. Again, Jack, after contentious talk about the ownership of the truck, reconciles with Curly who, in his turn, agrees to participate in the rescue of Judge Moody's car. Then Jack tells Curly: "We got a job this morning as whopping big as both our reputations put together!" (381). Again, to this reconciliation nature responds with rain that "had washed the truck so now in part it was International blue" (381). Impressed by the scene of harmony between the previous adversaries, Jack and Curly, Miss Ora tells Judge Moody: "Thought we was poor then. Compared to now we was all millionaires"

(402). The possibility of further reconciliation is echoed in Jack's ironical remarks when he discovers that his sister, Ella Fay, is in love with Curly: "Curly! Our battles will be called off before they start. We'd be one happy family!" (412). The irony, however, is that these ironical remarks might turn out to be true because Ella Fay is seen as the potential bride of Curly.

The total reconciliation between the Renfros, the Beechams and the Vaughans, from one side, and their neighbors, from the other, takes place when all the people present at Banner decide to attend Julia Mortimer's funeral. We hear Miss Beulah prompting Uncle Nathan and Miss Lexie to go and witness the burial of Miss Julia; Miss Beulah addresses Nathan: " You won't even stop in Banner and help bury Julia Mortimer"(375). In fact, Julia's burial ceremony marks the total reconciliation of Banner people and, in effect, triggers reconciliation with nature. At the cemetery, we observe "An old crape myrtle stood with branches weighted down by rain and casting the preponderance of its bloom over Sam Dale Beecham. It grew with a half dozen trunks, not round but like girl's arms, flat- sides; with the drops of rain to honeycomb them panicles of bloom looked heavy as flesh and twice as pink" (426-27). This image which associates death with rebirth is reminiscent of the century plant which blooms the moment its old flowers fall off. In this sense, the final reconciliation among the people in Banner and their neighbors has reinitiated them into the cycle of rebirth and, in effect, the reunion of the three families has the possibility of regaining its mythical status which was lost earlier through their wrong deeds toward themselves and others. Accordingly, in juxtaposing the behavior of people with

the performance of the land, Welty shows a superb skill of stitching human history into the myth of the land. Once people are in harmony with each other, the land will be in harmony with them.

Another significant issue Welty weaves subtly into her narrative is the question of individualism versus communal society. Obviously, there is a conflict between people who represent communal society and those who represent the voice of individualism. In this conflict, as Douglass Messerli and argues, the Banner people use language as a tactic of survival (352). Similarly, Susan Harrison contends that the Beecham-Renfro clans use the speech mode in order to perpetuate themselves as one unified family, while those who represent the individual voice use reading and writing as a tactic to promote their individualism and maintain a sense of independence (97). The Beechams and the Renfros sit around Granny and tell stories about their family; speech, for them, is a ritual whereby they can overcome the difficulties of life. Like the Fairchilds, the Renfro-Beecham clan are obsessed with their collectiveness and essentially are against any attempt of separateness. These people, according to Brother Bethune, do not change; even after the Beecham and Renfro men have come back from World War One, they remain the same: "They come back the same old Beechams boys they always was" (191). Messerli argues that the Beechams and the Renfros live a life of "presentinism," and "any revelation of true individuality horrifies the uncles and the aunts sitting and talking" (352). Indeed, separateness for them is a tragedy they can not cope with. In his attempt to mitigate the suffering of the Renfros over the temporal separateness of Jack,

Uncle Curtis laments his children's desertion of him: "Maybe me and Beck did raise a house full of sons and maybe not one of 'em did go to Parchman, but they left home just the same. Married and moved over to look after their wives' folk. Scattered" (66). Similarly, the Beechams have not yet come to terms with their sense of loss when their parents abandoned them when they were young; they still do not find an answer or justification for the behavior of their parents. The mysterious desertion of the Beecham parents is lamented by Uncle Noah: "Somebody was running away from us children and that's what I believed at the time and still believe [...] I just knew I was in pretty danger of losing 'em" (217). Also, Uncle Beck still wants to know why they left: "Take me back to the bridge a minute. What errand was they both so bent on when they hitched and cut loose from the house so early and drove out of sight of Grandpa and Granny, children and all, that morning" (218).

In fact, the trauma of separateness explains the attitude of the Beecham-Renfro clan toward many individuals such as Julia Mortimer, Gloria Rich, and Judge Moody. The Beechams and the Renfros do not like Julia Mortimer because what she teaches and preaches does encourage separateness. Messerli argues that Julia "was the arch enemy of the Beecham-Renfro clan, trying for decades to educate them, to make them give up their ingrained patterns of perception which in kinship they perpetuate" (354). Indeed, Julia represents the strong voice of individualism in Losing Battles. In this respect, Kreyling describes Julia Mortimer as "the thematic representative of the individual" (200). Miss Julia's battle with The Beechams and the Renfros is a

battle for the freedom of the individual. In her fight against ignorance, Julia is depicted as a strong-willed woman who devotes herself to educating the people around her. Julia realizes that the Beechams' and the Renfros' perceptions of themselves are destructive; therefore, she does her best to rescue and free them from what Messerli terms "the outmoded and destructive pattern of family behavior" (334). Miss Julia wants the Beechams and the Renfros to be aware of themselves as individuals who are capable of understanding themselves and the world around them. Julia's message is voiced by Gloria when the latter defends the former against the accusations of the Beechams and the Renfros: "Julia did not want anybody to live in the dark, not about anything, she wanted everything brought out in the open, to see and be known, she wanted people to spread their minds and their hearts to other people, so they could be read like books" (432).

The Beechams and the Renfros, however, see Miss Julia differently; they see her as a danger which threatens their sense of collectiveness and communal values. Miss Beulah understands what Julia is up to; she still remembers what Julia told them once in class: "She told us a time or two what her aim was, she wanted us to quit worshipping ourselves quite so whole hearted" (236). Uncle Curtis admits the spoiled nature of the Beecham boys and their indifferent attitude toward education: "Outside the home, we boys was more used to sitting on the bridge fishing than lining the recitation bench. Now she wanted that changed" (236). It is not surprising, then, to see the members of the reunion sitting around Granny and mocking Julia; they even applaud the cruelty of Miss Lexie toward her. In the last days of her life, Julia was nursed by Miss Lexie

who, instead of nursing her, inflicted on her severe suffering; she tied her to the bed and prevented her from communicating with the outside world. Lexie brags about her cruel treatment to Julia: “I tied her, that was the upshot [...] Tied her in bed” (278). Lexie goes on to tell the reunion how she deprived Julia of reading by not giving her any book; she also tells them that when she denied Julia a pencil, the latter used her fingers to write with. Kreyling argues that this episode of Lexie’s cruelty toward Julia “depicts the family relentlessly oppressive of the individual. Whenever Julia, the thematic representative of the individual, seeks some form of expression of individuality, the clan slams the request with flat refusal — and thinks no less of itself for doing so” (200). The members of the reunion keep laughing at Julia; however, Judge Moody and Gloria, previous students of Miss Julia, show much sympathy and even defend her against the family’s prejudice. For Judge Moody, the story of Julia “could make a stone cry” (306). Judge Moody defends Julia by admitting her influence on him: “She coached me in rhetoric, and I won first place in the Mississippi Field Meet” (302). Gloria, in turn, defends Julia strongly; she admits that it is Julia who “filled me so full with inspiration” (244).

Julia, in spite of Lexie’s siege, succeeds in having her written message delivered to the people outside. In fact, Julia’s attempt to write, Gyax argues, is an attempt to express her individualism and, in this sense, she opposes the collective speech rituals perpetuated by the Beechams and the Renfros. The letter which Judge Moody receives from Julia reveals a relentless will to keep up the fight against ignorance and help people understand their individual

potentialities. In this letter, however, Julia admits her defeat, but a careful reading of the letter indicates certain oxymoronic overtones Welty weaves into her narrative in a very artistic manner. In this letter, Julia writes:

The reason I could never win for good is that both sides are using the same tactics. Very likely true of all wars. It's a might. A teacher teaches and a pupil learns or fights against learning with the same force behind him. It is the survival instinct. It is a might, power, it's an iron weapon while it lasts. It is the desperation of staying alive against all the odds that keep both sides encouraged. But the side that gets licked gets to the truth first. When the battle is over, something may dawn there – with no help from the teacher, no help from the pupil, no help from the book. (298)

In this sense, defeat does not necessarily mean losing the battle; it is true that Julia is personally defeated in her effort to educate all the people in Banner, but, as Gygax argues, Julia's "fight against ignorance is partly successful" (85). In fact, Julia, who is ahead of her time, succeeds in educating some individuals who turn out to be famous lawyers, doctors, and politicians. Most importantly, however, she succeeds in creating a new generation of individuals who will take over the struggle against the collectiveness and the narrow circle of the family. Julia's attempt to write, says Gygax, is an attempt to express her individualism, and so she opposes the collective speech rituals perpetuated by the Beechams and the Renfros (87). Individuals such as Gloria, Vaughan and Judge Moody are real followers of Miss Julia; they are the people who will transform Julia's defeat into victory in the future.

Indeed, in Losing Battles, Gloria is the strongest voice of individualism; she is the queen of separateness. Gloria, the most admired student of Julia Mortimer, challenges her teacher and decides to marry Jack Renfro. Julia, however, wants Gloria to follow in her footsteps; she wants her to “teach, teach, teach” (169). Besides her ambition that Gloria will be an extension of her teaching career, Julia has other reasons for dissuading Gloria from marrying into the Beechams. She knows about the blood kinship between Gloria and Jack. Even though Julia hints to Gloria at that relationship, the latter makes her own choice and marries Jack Renfro. Gloria, however, does not take this marriage as a means of protection; on the contrary, she is the one who will protect Jack from the hegemony of the family. Because Gloria loves Jack, she takes upon herself the responsibility of teaching him: “I am right behind him teaching him” (248). Gloria seems to have the power and the stamina to fight the communal values of the Beecham-Renfro clan. Accordingly, when the members of the reunion discover that Gloria is the daughter of Rachael Sojourner and Sam Dale Beecham, they become very eager to incorporate her into the family; they try to baptize her by forcing watermelon in her mouth. Gloria, however, resists this ritual and refuses to say that she is a Beecham: “I don’t want to be a Beecham [...] Now it is ten times worse! I won’t be a Beecham” (268).

With this newly acquired power of individualism in addition to her love for Jack, Gloria does her best to separate him from the collectiveness of the family. In this sense, Gloria is like Robbie Reid of Delta Wedding. Gloria realizes that Jack is engulfed by the communal values of his family; therefore she does not

hesitate to declare her purpose of marrying him in front of his family: "I have been trying to save him since the day I saw him first. Protecting his poor head! [...] we'll live to ourselves one day yet, and do wonders. And raise our children to be both good and smart" (320). In this respect, Harrison argues that "in seeking, longing for a house of their own, Gloria asserts and reasserts her independence from the Beechams and the Renfros" (95). Gloria, however, realizes that her task is difficult because the family's might is formidable; therefore, she seeks separation and independence in the future. She tells Jack, "Someday yet we'll move to ourselves. And there'll be just you and me and Lady May" (435). Messerli attributes Gloria's aspiration for the future to her inability to change the present. He argues: "Because she concentrates entirely upon the future, she fails to help Jack change in the present and she fails to perceive how she and Jack can be affected by the future" (353). This argument is partially true, yet it does not take into consideration two major facts. The first concerns the authorial design of weaving into her narrative a present different from "presentinism". Welty thinks that the communal love maintained at the end between the Beecham-Renfro clan and their neighbors, is a guarantee of the desired rebirth. She believes in a present which is not lived by the codes of the past; such a different present will help the nation overcome the depression which crippled it. The second has to do with Welty's concept of feminine time. In most of her works, Welty finds that the future is the only time when women can achieve independence; in the future women can recognize themselves as free individuals.

Other strong voices of individualism are those of Judge Moody and Vaughan Renfro. Both of them have been influenced by Julia Mortimer's tactics of survival; they believe in the written word as an expression of the individual voice. Judge Moody is a staunch defender of Julia Mortimer; he believes that her tactics have made him a successful judge. The Judge's voice, according to Kreyling, is "the voice of law, abstract and rational, from written status to particular cases" (203). Accordingly, it is no wonder that Moody's professional practice clashes with the ritualistic law of the Beechams and the Renfros. These people are prejudiced against Judge Moody for pronouncing his judgment against Jack and sending him to Parchman for two years. According to the ritualistic law of the family, Jack's fight with Curly was not an act of aggression but rather of defense; he wanted to defend the history and honor of the family. However, the law, which Judge Moody represents, considers every individual responsible for what he/she does. When Judge Moody is invited to join the reunion, he sits and listens to the stories told by the different members of the family. He does not show much interest in the stories they tell, but when Jack asks his family to forgive Judge Moody, the latter is surprised and inquires: "Why is it necessary to forgive me?" (209). Later, he is told that he should be forgiven for sending Jack to Parchman. Judge Moody explains to them that if a similar case is brought to him, he would give the same verdict, because everything is stipulated in the written law, a law which does not take into consideration good intentions. The Beechams and the Renfros do not want to believe in this law because they have their own law. A second point of contention between Judge

Moody and the family emerges when the marriage of Gloria and Jack is discovered to be violating state law. Judge Moody advises Jack and Gloria to go to another state in order to avoid punishment. To this advice, the Beecham-Renfro clan give a cold shoulder. Judge Moody is defeated in the end when Gloria shows him Lady May, a healthy child that can not be transformed into an abstraction. The lost battle of Judge Moody, however, is not a defeat either for the individual or for the law, because, according to Julia, the one who is “licked” reaches the truth first.

As for Vaughan, he represents the emergent voice of individualism in the Beecham and Renfro family. He has a strong desire to distance himself from the collectiveness of the family. Vaughan has always been overshadowed by his elder brother Jack. When the latter is sent to jail, the former has a chance to see himself in relation to the family. Kreyling argues that after Jack’s imprisonment, Vaughan “comes into his own incipient as the individual ready and willing to flee the clustering family to the interior life symbolized in the school” (205). Indeed Vaughan, the best speller in Banner, loves school because there he can understand himself better than in the close circle of the family. Vaughan is so obsessed with school that it has become the object of his nightly meditations: “if it would be morning now! He thought with such sharp pain that he might have just been asked to give it up. He so loved Banner school that he would have been beaten sunup and driven there now, if the doors had had any way of opening for him” (364). For Vaughan, school has been a place where he can learn about

himself and his relation to others; school enhances his desire for separateness and independence.

Later, when the reunion is over, Vaughan strongly expresses this desire of separateness from the adhesiveness of the family; he is increasingly troubled and puzzled by the collectiveness of the family. When he looks for a private place to sleep, he finds people “on every side and behind every door” (366). Suddenly, one of the doors is swung open by the wind and Vaughan finds himself face to face with Granny who does not recognize him; it is then Vaughan gets troubled, so he “fled out of her dazzled sight”(366). This situation makes Kreyling compare Vaughan with Laura McRaven in Delta Wedding when she is not recognized by the Fairchilds. Indeed, Vaughan is disturbed by the indifferent attitude of the family toward him; he is worried that Granny does not distinguish him from other members of the family: “She didn’t know who I was, she didn’t care” (366). However, the interesting thing about Vaughan, as Harrison argues, is that he talks less than he listens; his consciousness is revealed through the narrator. Vaughn does not seem to oppose the family’s claim for unity, but at the same time he vies for his individual voice. Vaughan believes that he is not less clever than Jack, but he does not want to take over the role of his brother for the sake of the family. In this sense, Vaughan’s vision, as argued by Harrison, encompasses the communal as well as the individual: “Though he is confirmed a member of the family, he is also the best speller” (98). In fact, in the character of Vaughan, Welty seems to connect what seems to be disconnected; the individual is as important as the communal society, and the relationship between the two

should be complementary rather than conflictual. Without individuals such as Gloria, Moody, Julia, and Vaughan, society will lose its power and continuity.

Another element Welty stitches into her narrative in Losing Battles is the relationship between the feminine and the masculine. Again, as is the case in most of her works, Welty shows that the heroic quest is not limited to the male hero; women can also partake in the heroic quest. Such a quest, as in The Robber Bridegroom and The Golden Apples, can not be fruitful unless there is harmony between the feminine and the masculine; it is a harmony that will bring about rebirth and finally helps to reinitiate society in the regenerative cycle. In Losing Battles, the main female questor is Gloria Rich who is involved in a joint quest with her husband, Jack Renfro, the mythical hero of the Beecham- Renfro clan. What is interesting, however, is the way Welty prepares Gloria for such a quest; Welty uses the weaving metaphor to show how Gloria's successful heroic quest is woven in an artistic manner. Every stage in Gloria's quest is intricately related to the others. In this sense, Julia's heroic quest is the starting point for Gloria's joint quest.

Indeed, Julia Mortimer is a great heroic questor in Losing Battles. Although she never speaks, because she dies on the same day as the reunion, Julia establishes herself as a relentlessly heroic questor. According to the people who have been close to her, Julia is a staunch fighter against ignorance; she does her best to educate the people of Banner. In her letter to Judge Moody, Julia mentions that teaching is like a battle: "a teacher teaches and a learner fights against learning" (298). Julia, however, is an example of a

dedicated teacher who never gives up the fight; she has never taken a day off: “Rain or shine, she did not let father or son miss a day” (239). Indeed, Julia’s fight against ignorance is a fierce battle. When Beulah refers to Julia as a dragon, Gloria defends her teacher: “She was Saint George [...] and ignorance was the dragon” (245). In this sense, Julia, as Gygax argues, is as heroic as Miss Eckhart in The Golden Apples, but Julia is “fascinated by a heroic act, not necessarily the one executed by Perseus” (85). Even though Julia admits defeat, she has been able to slay the dragon, because most of the students whom she has taught are now doctors, lawyers and teachers.

Julia’s heroic quest is a source of inspiration for her student, Gloria. Like, Cassie Morrison in “June Recital,” Gloria has a fire in her head: “it is still in words of fire in my brain” (314). Gloria is fascinated by the heroic quest of her teacher to the extent that she identifies with her: “Why, at the first warning she gave – I thought I might even be hers” (315). At this stage, Gloria seems to be ready for her own heroic quest; she has already grasped the lesson from her teacher. In this sense, Gloria emerges as a fluid individual who will affirm her identity by the quest she embarks on. Again, Gloria is reminiscent of Easter in “Moon Lake”; like Easter, she is an orphan whose identity will be confirmed by whatever she will do.

Getting ready for her heroic quest, Gloria has to go through certain rituals before she embarks on this quest. She has to have her femininity sanctified. In this respect, the circling of the small cousin girls around Gloria is ritualistic. Randisi argues that this circling is “a celebration of femininity, a preface to the

circle that later encloses Jack, Gloria, and Lady May” (85). The circle, as in The Robber Bridegroom, is significant for its mythical associations and its relation to the rebirth process. Accordingly, the circle which encloses Jack and Gloria seems to be another important stage in Gloria’s joint quest. This circle is also similar to the circle which encloses Rosamond and Jamie in The Robber Bridegroom; it is an initial step toward natural rebirth. In Losing Battles, Gloria and Jack are enclosed by a circle: “Around the circle of needles, slick and hot and sweet as skin under them, and dead quiet, they chased each other on the hobble, fast as children on their knees, around the tree” (99). The scene enacts a sexual act between the two questors; it is an act between a husband and wife who are bound to each other by deep love. Clearly, this scene parodies the Zeus myth in which Danaë is struck by the showers of gold sent by Zeus. This meeting between the two questing lovers is what Beulah, Jack’s mother, has been waiting for: “This minute is all in the world she’s been waiting on” (94). It is important, however, to notice how Welty describes how this love meeting extends to its surroundings: “a pack of courting squirrels electrified a pine tree in front of them, poured down it, ripped on through the bushes, trees, anything, tossing the branches, sobbing and gulping like breasted doves” (99). In response to this intimate encounter, which is mythically ritualized, portents of natural rebirth emerge amidst the dusty leaves: “The leaves and stalks looked dust-laden as the old carpentered chairs that take their places by more traveled roadsides in summer, but the morning’s own flowers were as yellow as embroidery floss” (100).

Compared with Jack's first heroic journey, in which he fought with Curly and was sent to jail, this joint journey is marked by a great deal of success. Gloria, with her common sense, manages to put Jack, "the prodigal son," on the right track. When the latter vows revenge against Judge Moody, the former shows opposition: "I hope you are wrong" (117). Protesting against Aycock's complicity, Gloria gives Lady May to Jack, saying: "if you can't be a better example to Lady May—hold her!" (119). Gloria's behavior creates some confusion, thus causing Jack's and Aycock's plan to fail; Judge Moody swerves his Buick in order to avoid hitting Gloria and Lady May. It is this unexpected act which makes Jack discard his revenge motive and invite the Moodys to the family's reunion. Empowered by the heroic legacy of Miss Julia Mortimer and the success of her initial joint quest, Gloria appears at the reunion very defiant; she strongly defends Miss Julia against the prejudice of the Beechams and the Renfros. Gloria, however, reveals that she disagreed with Julia concerning her marriage to Jack: "I argued with her as good as she did [...] I asked her if she could give me just three good reasons right quick why I couldn't give up my teaching and marry that minute if I wanted" (250). In this sense, Gloria is like Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples; the latter refuses to pursue her music career as Miss Eckhart has wished her to. Even though Gloria believes in Miss Julia, she will not allow her to determine her own life. Gloria is interested in affirming her own identity in her own way; therefore, it is not surprising to find her resistant to the family's attempts to impose an identity on her. When Granny implies that Rachael Sojourner is likely to be Gloria's mother, Gloria rejects the

assumption: "I do not want to believe I am Rachael's" (256). Gloria wants to remain Julia's secret: "'But I was a secret [...] Whosoever I was, I was her secret.' She jumped up, her head like a house afire" (256). It is the fire of the heroic quest whereby she can assert her own identity as an independent individual. It is no wonder, then, to see Julia reject the family's ritual of trying to baptize her as a Beecham: "I do not want to be a Beecham!" (268) Gloria does not want any identity imposed on her; she is the only one who can decide who she is.

The second journey of Gloria's joint heroic quest takes place when Jack decides to go to Banner Top in order to rescue Judge Moody's car. This time, however, the feminine presence is reinforced by Mrs. Beulah who "thinks it's a mother's place to be there and see it done right" (375). In fact, Mrs. Beulah's presence is significant since this journey has to do with the long awaited desire for rebirth; still, everybody hopes Jack, the mythical hero of the family, will bring rebirth to Banner. In this sense, the feminine presence represented by Mrs. Beulah, Gloria, and Lady May is essential to confirming human rebirth; the three females provide an image of a society which sustains itself through a matriarchal line. Jack is expected to bring rebirth, but in order to secure the continuity of the imminent rebirth, the feminine presence must be there to control and guide the masculine power; Jack needs the common sense and wisdom of women. Mrs. Beulah is there to confirm the importance of the human element in the rescue operation: "Don't count on either of these machines [...] It's an example of grab-bag to me" (383). When the men succeed in bringing down the Buick, it is

Beulah who ritualizes the new spirit of cooperation by singing “Blessed Assurance”. Gloria, in turn, is there to make sure that Jack makes use of her wisdom and to remind him of their future life together: “If we can’t do any better than we are doing now, what will Lady May think of us when we’re old and gray?” (390). Gloria also participates in the quest; she is seen with Jack in the tree, “tumbling toward each other” (391). Indeed, it is the feminine presence which helps Jack to succeed not only in rescuing Judge Moody’s car, but also in bringing the spirit of rebirth to Banner society. The strong feminine presence has made some critics deny Jack any heroic traits. Gygax, for example, does not consider him a hero; for her Jack “is confronted with the kind of adventures that belong to the chivalric world” (91). In fact, Gygax’s vision ignores the overall harmony Welty wants to maintain between the feminine and the masculine. It is this harmony between the two lovers, Jack and Gloria, that will reinitiate the society into the cycle of rebirth.

A final element Welty cleverly balances and weaves into her narrative is the notion of kinship versus that of the outsider. As has been shown earlier, the Beecham-Renfro clan have been very careful to preserve and perpetuate the unity of the family; they have adhered to each other and not allowed any insider to intrude into the narrow circle of the family. Outsiders such as Julia Mortimer, Judge Moody, Stovall Curly, Dearman, and others have been seen as adversaries to the family, but, as Seymour Gross remarks, one of Welty’s ingenuities in Losing Battles is that “the battle between the family and Julia Mortimer, like Jack and Curly’s fistfight or the family’s sworn enmity towards

Judge Moody, is not the collision of discreet antagonism, but paradoxically of foes 'well-matched or sweethearts' come together" (127). Again and in a very artistic manner, Welty reconciles the polarities in the relationship between the kin and the outsider. Julia Mortimer, Judge Moody, and Curly are finally perceived as kin to the Beecham-Renfro clan.

As for Julia Mortimer, she has been considered by the Beechams and the Renfros as the "arch-enemy". They have severely mocked and criticized her for her attitude towards them. Notwithstanding this negative perception of Julia, many of the Beechams and the Renfros admit Julia's sincere effort to educate them; some of them even have praised her. Uncle Dolphus is grateful to Julia: "Yes 'm, she taught the generations. She was our cross to bear" (240). Miss Lexie Renfro, who tells Julia's story with much regret, also admits her deep love for Julia: "I worshiped her! I worshiped Miss Julia Mortimer [...] She taught me as far as the seventh grade, she encouraged me when I was coming up" (272). Even Beulah, Julia's strongest adversary, admits Julia's influence on her by enhancing her spelling ability, an ability she is proud of: "It is the speller oh, how I could beat the world spelling. I could spell everybody in the family" (289). Julia has also influenced the new generation in the Beecham- Renfro family. Vaughan is an enthusiastic student and Etoyle is a talented student and has a special skill in embroidery. All the members of the Beechm-Renfro clan are surprised when they discover that it was their great grandfather who prayed to God for a school in Banner; they discover that Julia is an answer to the prayer of their great

grandfather. Julia, therefore, as Gross argues, “not only moves forward from Beulah to Vaughan but backward to the family beginnings” (129).

Being implicated in such an intimate manner in the history of the Beecham- Renfro clan, Julia starts to be perceived differently by her former adversaries. They discover that she is a kin to everybody. The relationship between Julia and the Beecham-Renfro clan, as described by Gross, is “one of the unconscious congruities, interacting polarities, unperceived affinities as well as moral antipodes” (130). It is no wonder, then, that all of them attend the burial ceremony of Julia. Julia is further confirmed as a kin for them when she is buried in Banner next to their dead relatives; it is as if Welty wants to show the importance of place in reinforcing kinship.

Another outsider and a former adversary to the Beecham-Renfro clan is Judge Moody. He is the one who has sentenced and sent Jack to Parchman; he wants to make of him an example for the others. Just before his arrival at the reunion, the family members recall with a sense of bitterness the courtroom scene in which Judge Moody did not show either mercy or understanding for Jack when he took the safe out of Curly’s store. Ironically, when Judge Moody’s car falls into the ditch, it is Jack who helps to pull the car out of the ditch. When Jack arrives at the reunion, he is told by Uncle Homer that the man he has helped is Judge Moody who has sent him to jail. Enraged by the discovery, Jack decides to go back and undo his Samaritan act. Surprisingly, while Jack is planning revenge, Judge Moody swerves his car to avoid hitting Gloria and Lady May. It is then Jack feels grateful and invites the Moodys to the reunion because

they are now stranded in Banner. At the reunion, the family first gives a cold welcome to the Moodys, but when Jack tells them what has happened, they start to be cordial and hospitable. It is then Judge Moody is forgiven and offered the best food and the most convenient accommodation. Commenting on Jack's behavior, Bridget Pieschel asserts: "Like the original Samaritan, who personally treats the injured man's wounds and pays for his lodging, Jack wants to treat the Judge like kin because he 'can't let some stranger shove his way in and help' rescue the car" (86). The next day, Jack, in conjunction with Aycock, Curly, and Vaughan, manages to rescue Moody's car which was held on Banner Top. The rescue scene is a beautiful image of social harmony which reflects Welty's skill of converting foes into friends. Gross describes this scene as a magical moment in "which disparities are made to link—like the hilarious 'chain' of people, animals and machines which effects the car's rescue" (132). Being grateful to Jack, Judge Moody "put his rope-burned hand" and Jack "put out his bloody one and shook" (421). Clearly, this image of harmony which is blessed by the hand shake is an indication of Welty's artistic technique which finds its echo in the act of weaving.

A final example of a previous foe and an intrusive outsider who becomes a kin to the Beechams and the Renfros is Stovall Curly. He is the son of Dearman whom Uncle Nathan has killed because of his growing power in Banner. Jack fights with Curly over the family ring which Ella Fay gives to the latter in exchange for some candy. Jack's attempt to retrieve the family ring is considered an aggravated battery for which he is sent to jail. However, when

Jack returns from prison, he is met by Curly who embraces him cordially. Curly admits to Jack that in his absence Banner has suffered much. The incident with Moody's car has been another chance for rapprochement between the former adversaries. Even though Curly asks for a payment for his help, Jack is still appreciative to him because he will bring his truck in order to help in the rescue operation. Jack becomes more grateful to Curly when they succeed in towing the Buick. However, the dramatic change in the relationship between Jack and Curly occurs when the latter reveals his love for Ella Fay, Jack's sister. Curly's intention is to marry Ella Fay who, on many occasions, reveals her love to Curly. According to Gross, this imminent marriage will make Curly "like it or not part of the family" (132). Again Welty shows a peculiar skill of reconciling the former adversaries and making of them friends and relatives. Curly's marriage to Fay will make him forget his father's murder which Nathan has already regretted and expiated for by inflicting punishment on himself and cutting off his hand. Welty wants to suggest that it is only through love and friendship that society can prosper and become a safe refuge for future wanderers.

To conclude, one can affirm that, in Losing Battles, Welty has successfully inscribed her feminine narrative discourse by her continual employment of the weaving metaphor. Through her frequent references to domestic arts, such as weaving, quilting and embroidery, Welty wants to remind us that in her narrative she applies the artistic skills inherent in such feminine arts. Welty seems to oppose the pen-penis metaphor which is embedded in masculine narrative. Accordingly, Welty uses the weaving narrative as an indication of women's

creativity. Therefore, Welty weaves into her narrative different conflicting issues such as the relation between the history of people and the myth of land, the notion of individualism versus that of community, the concept of kin as opposed to the outsider, and the relationship between the feminine and the masculine.

At the beginning of Losing Battles, people complain about draught and lack of vegetation; they think that the land is turning against them. Parallel to this sense of aridness, we learn that the history of these people is full of conflicts and tragedies; there have been much acrimony and dislocation in the human relations. By her employment of the weaving metaphor, Welty pulls the threads and reconciles the irreconcilable; the portents of rebirth in land and nature emerge when the people at Banner reconcile with each other. The burial scene of Julia becomes a moment of total reconciliation, reconciliation of the people among themselves and the reconciliation with the land.

Also, and in a very artistic manner, Welty stresses the importance of the communal values as well as those of individualism. At the beginning, it seems that the two sides have been at odds with each other, but we finally discover that the two are complementary to each other. Miss Julia has been seen as a threat because she teaches and preaches separateness, but in the end we understand that the individuals she has taught and coached are influential in society; they are the lawyers, the teachers and the politicians who will sustain the integrity and the continuity of the community. The portrayal of Vaughan's character depicts the balanced relationship between the individual and community.

Welty has also employed the weaving metaphor in reconciling the notion of the outsider and that of the kin. Julia Mortimer, Judge Moody, Stovall Curly and others, all have been seen as a threat to the narrowly closed circle of the Beecham- Renfro clan. Welty, however, succeeds in reconciling the two sides. Even though the Beechams and the Renfros have criticized Julia for her strictness, they have also praised her for her good intent to educate them. Their affinity with her is strengthened when they discover that she is the answer to their great grandfather's prayer. The family also reconciles with Judge Moody who explains for them that the sentence he issued against Jack has no personal bias; he is a man who acts in accordance to the written law. The incident with the car has shown how Judge Moody cares for human beings more than he does for the machine. The incident has helped to create a situation in which he attends the reunion like any member of the family. Also, the love between Ella Fay and Curly Stovall has helped the reconciliation between the two families. Curly will be a member of the family, a member who will be as eligible for their love and votes as Uncle Homer.

Finally, Welty has depicted a balanced relationship between the feminine and the masculine in the heroic quest. Gloria is as entitled as Jack to the heroic quest. Welty shows that Julia's heroic legacy is essential to the success of Gloria's quest; it is a legacy which makes Gloria defiant in her struggle for an independent identity. When Gloria shares with Jack the heroic quest, there have been fruitful results; the Moodys are brought to the reunion. Also, because the heroic quest is based on mutual love between the two sexes, the chances of

rebirth in society are very strong. Welty has also shown that the feminine presence represented by Mrs. Beulah, Gloria, and Lady May is to confirm the matriarchal role in the imminent rebirth.

Notes

^v For the biblical connotations in Losing Battles, see Karl Heinz Westarp, "Beyond Loss: "Eudora Welty Losing Battles," 56.

^v For more discussion of the relationship between the historical and regional myth, see Jennifer Lynn Randisi, A Tissue of Lies, 83.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIGNS, SYMBOLS AND IMAGES: WELTY'S FEMININE DISCOURSE IN
THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER

In her poem, Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett Browning says

By the way;
The works of women are symbolical
We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,
Producing what? A pair of slippers, Sir,
To put on when you're weary—or stool
To stumble over and vex you . . . curse that stool!
(qtd. in Walker 108).

Indeed, women's writings are not usually straightforward, but rather subversive in style and content. Women writers, Welty being no exception, often encapsulate their feminine experience via symbols and subtle images. In most of her works, Welty uses symbols and images that are related to the domain of women's experiences. In fact, The Optimist's Daughter is Welty's last novel, yet it is one of the most elusive of all her works. Part of its difficulty is due to the degree of uncertainty triggered by a constellation of signs, symbols and images.

Browning's lines, quoted above, seem to pose a caveat that it is not easy to interpret any female work without decoding its symbols and subtle images. In general, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., describes Welty's style as "shimmering, hovering,

elusive, fanciful, and fastening on little things. Entirely feminine, it moves lightly, capriciously, mirroring the bemused, diverted quality of the people whom it describes" (133). Indeed, all of these stylistic attributes can be found in The Optimist's Daughter; it is a novel which is stylistically structured upon certain symbols and images. Marilyn Arnold stresses the importance of the use of such symbols and images in sustaining the thematic unity of The Optimist's Daughter; she argues: "Welty's several themes are death, human relationship and the effects of memory on the past, but through the use of image and symbol, ritual and parable she weaves them together into one thematic whole" (239). In fact, the images and symbols, Welty uses in The Optimist's Daughter, are significant because they are usually associated with the specificity of women's experience. Welty, whether consciously or unconsciously, seems to be committed to her sex by writing as a woman. We, as readers, as well as Laurel, the protagonist, are invited to decode these symbols and images from a feminist perspective. This chapter will shed some light on Welty's feminine style and further decode the symbols, the signs, and the images from a feminist perspective. Such a discussion will help to account for my intuitions about the feminist concerns of Welty. In this respect, the novel seems to convey a statement of feminist dissatisfaction with the conventions and the norms of patriarchal society. For this purpose, Welty utilizes symbolism and imagery as an effective technique to question the values of the masculine tradition. Therefore, the focus of this chapter will be on the intricate meanings of symbols such as memory, vision, hands, birds, flowers and domestic images such as death beds, women's

gatherings and other natural images. However, these stylistic features and images will not be discussed without being accounted for in terms of relevant meanings.

A first interesting sign of Welty's feminine discourse in The Optimist's Daughter is her substitution of the patrilinear narrative for the cyclical and insequencial narrative of the memory. In doing so, Welty seems to be drawing on Virginia Woolf's technique of foregrounding the act of remembering. This technique, according to Woolf, is an important element in actualizing women's experience; women can only register their real experience and true perception of their surroundings through the act of remembering. Franziska Gygax argues that Welty's recourse to memory as a narrative strategy is not new. She speculates that: "It is probably not coincidental that Virginia Woolf is a 'precursor' for Welty with respect to memory; as Welty states, Woolf was the one who opened the door" (98). Given the fact that Welty's manipulation of memory as a narrative technique is an indication that she is in the fashion of women writers who disrupt the linearity of the masculine narrative, her recourse to memory can be reckoned as a deliberate attempt to question the fixity of the past. In this respect, Welty's manipulation of memory is a point of departure from the male narrative. This shift from the linearity of the masculine narrative to the circularity of female narrative brings to mind what Alice. A. Jardine says later about the crisis in the masculine narrative and the need for women to shake off its authority by following a narrative which is in defiance of 'time/ space' duality. It is the duality

which has been instituted by Western culture in which time is perceived as masculine and space as feminine (563-4).

Indeed, Welty's recourse to memory seems to fit very well with the feminist concerns of her female narrator, Laurel, who is interested in coming to terms with the past. Generally, memory functions within infinite space, a space which knows no boundaries. In his discussion of Saint Augustine's definition of memory and its importance, Marion Montgomery describes memory: "It is an expandable container with no delineated margins, holding the self as continuously alive, unless that self attempt to freeze-dry consciousness by thought's action of arresting its own active continuity in this always continuous present moment" (146). Laurel does not seem to be interested in the sequence of actions per se but rather in the thematic connections among these actions. She is skeptical of the past; therefore, we find her resisting its linearity and rigidity because, for her, the past seems to be full of lies. When Major Bullock starts to speak about the heroic achievements of Judge McKelva, Laurel protests: "They are misinterpreting him—falsifying that's what mother called it. [. . .] I am his daughter. I want what people say now to be the truth" (83). Laurel's reaction can be partially reckoned as a kind of defense against the misrepresentation by the Mount Salus people of the person of her father. However, one can argue that her protest also reveals a feminist attitude towards the falsehood of the chivalric values of the past. Suzan Harrison argues that Laurel's disliking of Mount Salus mourners' eulogizing of her father is due to the fact that whatever they say does not meet her standards. Harrison explains: "At

the funeral they have begun to build up apocrypha and legend, placing Judge McKelva in a removed and 'valorized past'" (119). Therefore, it is not strange when Laurel starts to think of the past as a dead and a solid object; nor is it surprising when she declares at the end of the novel: "The past is no more open to help or hurt than Father in his coffin. The past is like him, impervious, and can never be awakened" (179). Welty, here and through her female heroine, protests against the rigidity of the historical past, against the masculine domination and all the false heroic values embedded in its chivalric code. The only way, then, is to let loose memory because memory, as described by Arnold, is "fluid, dynamic", while the past is "static and invulnerable" (241).

It is only through memory that Laurel has come to probe and understand the true relationship between her father and mother. Later, when Laurel is in her room on the eve of her father's funeral, she starts pondering the romantic relationship between her father and mother. The narrator, whose voice converges with that of Laurel, in what is stylistically termed as free direct speech, comments: "When Laurel was a child, in this room and in this bed where she lay now, she closed her eyes like this and the rhythmic, nighttime sound of the two beloved reading to each other where she could hear them never letting a silence divide or interrupt them" (58). It is important to notice that because memory is unrestrained by the sequential order of the past, Laurel's mind moves backward and forward in a shuttling movement. She remembers how the relationship between her father and mother had its ups and downs. She recalls what her mother told her about the first romantic encounter with her father, Judge

McKelva. The latter had been a student at the University of Virginia when he met Miss Becky while riding her horse 'Selim' to school. The letter Laurel finds in her mother's desk also indicates the romantic relationship which used to bind her parents. She is certainly impressed by the vehement emotions her father's letters convey; she is impressed by the passionate language, her mother's initials stamped on the envelopes, and the transparent ribbons holding the love letters. The snapshot book also reminds Laurel of the happiness of her parents: "it is a careful record of those days" (136).

Therefore, Laurel's defense of her father at his funeral and of her mother in her confrontation with Fay indicate that she has sealed off in her mind a rosy picture of the private relationship between her parents. This ideal picture represents an episode of the past, and Laurel seems for some time to be adamant in considering this picture as a final memory of her parents. Peter Schmidt describes Laurel's attempt to fix that image of perfection of the lives of her parents together as a violation of their lives: "Laurel's attempts to create a perfectly safe past are themselves as much a violation of her parents' lives together as anything that Fay does or any story told at the funeral; Laurel 'in her need' is being false to her own fullest memories" (693). It is clear, here, that Welty does not want her female heroine to be attached to a false ideal past a past which glorifies the virile and chivalric values. Therefore, it is not strange when Laurel realizes through her memory that the relationship between her father and mother was not as golden as she mistakenly thinks. It is only when Laurel searches the room of her parents and finds the letters her father sent to

her mother, that her memory starts to question the fixity of the past. Laurel, like a 'somnambulist', starts to see different incongruous scenes in her parents' journey through life together; she recalls scenes of happiness as well as scenes of suffering. Laurel gets disconcerted when she realizes that neither she nor her father had been of any help to her mother in her sickness: "Her trouble was that very desperation. And no one had the power to cause that except the one she desperately loved. It was betrayal over betrayal" (150). Laurel also blames herself because she had been as helpless as her father in her mother's ordeal. We hear Becky blaming Laurel: "You could have saved your mother. But you stood by and wouldn't intervene. I despair for you" (151). Thus, one can conclude that memory has the power of disrupting the past and questioning its masculine claims. In this sense, one can confirm that Welty's empowering of Laurel through memory is an indication of her feminist interest in destabilizing the past. In this respect, it is understandable when we see Laurel at the end of the novel removing all the signs of her parents' lives together and, in turn, entrusting their memories to her ever questioning memory.

In fact, Welty's recourse to memory is not the only technique she uses in order to disrupt the linearity of the past. Her frequent references to the Mardi Gras carnival are of great significance. In her discussion of the "elegiac carnivals" in Welty's The Optimist's Daughter and Woolf's To the Lighthouse, Harrison indicates that both writers use comic elements to "undercut and mock" the elegiac tone of their narrative. She argues that "By bringing the elegiac in contact with comedy and laughter, both Woolf and Welty *carnivalize* it" (115).

Drawing on Bakhtin's carnival, Harrison shows how the carnivalistic spirit disrupts the rigid restrictions of Lent. In this sense, the carnival marks the celebration of the body and sexual intercourse, two elements essential to any rebirth process. In this process of regeneration, time is redefined as being cyclic rather linear. It is not strange, then, when we see Fay always associated with carnivals. We see her in the wake of McKelva's operation remind herself, with much bitterness, of his promise to take her to the carnival parade: "When he told me, he would bring , he'd bring me to New Orleans some day, it was to see the carnival...And the carnival's going on right now" (13).

Clearly, Fay is introduced to represent this carnivalistic spirit. We observe her being associated with images of sexuality and sensuality. The pink satin color in her room is an indication of her overriding sexual desire. Even when her husband lies motionless in the hospital, we hear her addressing him: "How do you like 'em hon? Don't you want to let's go dancing?" (28). Fay, who describes herself as a lady of the future, does not appreciate the past; she believes that the past is full of deprivation and austerity. For her, the festive present is a prefiguration of the future. So, it is not surprising when we see her addressing the dead body of her husband: "Oh, hon, get up, get out of there" (85).

Ostensibly, this is a comic scene in which Welty parodies women mourning over dead husbands; however, Welty seems to be using the double consciousness technique. Her ulterior purpose is to show how the past is illusive to Fay; even though her husband is lying dead, she thinks he is still alive. This is a reminder of Emily in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily". Fay, like Emily, does not believe in the

actuality of death. Fay has always thought that her husband's remedy lies in nature, in the sense that he can be resurrected by leaving the past behind. According to Harrison, Fay's principle of life is a threat to Laurel who has striven, for some time, to control it by sealing a golden picture of it in her mind: "Fay's presence destroys Laurel's control of the past, forcing her to reevaluate and recreate her own origins" (121). Accordingly, Fay seems to embody the power which forces Laurel to renegotiate her own relationship with the linear past. However, and according to Harrison, Laurel should find a middle ground in which she balances her affinity to the past and Fay's disbelief in it. In either case, one can easily confirm that Welty's symbolic use of the carnival is another effective technique whereby she questions and disrupts the linearity of "man's time".

Another symbolic ramification of the shift in the narrative technique is the emergence of the female narrator as a reliable point of view. It is interesting to observe how Welty juxtaposes, and then reverses, the roles of narrators. At the beginning of The Optimist's Daughter, Laurel is much closer to her father than her dead mother, yet in the second part of the novel she gradually assumes the role of the mother-daughter narrator. In the first part of the novel, Judge McKelva, after his operation, becomes increasingly obsessed with time, shuffling its moments one by one: "Eventually, Laurel saw that her father had accepted her uselessness with her presence all along. What occupied his full mind was time itself; time passing, he was concentrating" (19). Later, however, McKelva loses sense of time: "*Nicholas Nickleby* had seemed as endless to her as time must seem to him" (25). McKelva's loss of memory and eyesight gives way to

Laurel's memory. After her father's death, her senses unleash her memory. It is only through memory that Laurel becomes associated with her mother. Gygas affirms:

The recollection of her mother's deathbed only occurs after her father's death, that is, the memories are not narrated at the time of her father's dying or immediately after his death. Only after the funeral can Laurel explore the true nature of her memories regarding her parents, and at a moment of epiphany, recognition of the ambivalent character of her parents' relationship, she is capable of facing her mother's ordeal respectively. (101)

Memory has led her to reflect on her early childhood and the life of her mother. Through memory, Laurel has a penetrating view into the life of her mother, her happiness as well as her suffering. The intrusive third person narrator comments on the value of memory to Laurel, particularly when she is associated with her mother: "Firelight and warmth—that was what her memory gave her" (133).

Now, therefore, most of the point of view comes through Laurel's act of remembering. This new stance has already put her in a position to convey to us the real experience of her mother. Cited in Bloom, Reynolds Price confirms the reliability of Laurel's point of view: "I take Laurel's understanding to be the author and ours; there can be no second meaning, no resorts to attempts to discredit Laurel's vision" (88). We begin to embrace Laurel's vision of the real life of her mother when she realizes that the relationship between her father and mother was not as ideal as she always mistakenly thinks; her mother has been

humiliated by her father because he never showed any serious effort to help her in her ordeal. Laurel also blames herself for not intervening to help her mother. However, and according to Peter Schmidt, Laurel never blames her mother; he asserts: "What is most remarkable here is that Laurel never expresses anger towards her mother for turning on her in her death-bed despair, either originally or in retrospect, she seems to reserve her anger solely for Fay and for her father" (695). In fact, Becky's anger is due to the fact that she was not present when her mother died, and she must have felt the same shame and guilt Laurel feels now because she was indifferent to her mother in her sickness. Laurel is angry with Fay because she is the usurper of her mother's place; she "was Becky's own dread" (174). Laurel is also angry with her father because he never kept the promise he made to her mother.

A very interesting symbolic act, which also has different connotations pertinent to women's experience, is this shift from visionary senses to other thermal and kinetic images such as touch and hearing. The novel opens with Judge McKelva complaining about an eye problem. First, it is believed to be an insignificant disturbance caused by a small scratch from Becky's climber and, according to Fay, "Nature would have tended to it" (41). However, Judge's McKelva's eye starts to disturb him more, so he decides to see Dr. Courtland. Upon examining him, Dr. Courtland discovers that the right retina has slipped and it needs urgent treatment. What is strange, however, is McKelva's eye problem seems to go beyond a mere scratch; it is not an outside problem: "What happened did not happen to the outside of his eye, it happened to the inside" (7).

Dr. Courtland, against Fay's wish, decides to operate on Judge McKelva. After this operation McKelva lies in the hospital bed without movement: "No moving. No turning. No tears" (15). With the bandage on his eyes, McKelva is unable to see anything around him. What is surprising here is the fact that McKelva's inability to see extends to the people around him. Gygax argues: "This deficiency of sight already indicates a problem in perceiving one's surroundings. It does not concern Judge McKelva exclusively, but he is the most obvious example of a blind man, both literally and figuratively" (99). This seems to be a significant symbolic sign which suggests that McKelva's distorted vision goes beyond the physically crippled eyesight; it has to do with the act of perception. It is not strange, then, to observe that this dislocated vision has already affected his daughter Laurel. When in the hospital room, Laurel finds difficulty in locating where she is:

This was like nowhere. Even what could be seen from the high window might have been the rooftops of any city, colorless and tarpatched, with here and there small mirrors of rainwater. At first, she did not realize she could see the bridge—it stood out there dull in the distance, [. . .] The river was not visible. She lowered the blind against the wide white sky that reflected it. It seemed to her that the grayed- down, anonymous room might be some reflection itself of Judge McKelva's "disturbance," his dislocated vision that had brought him here. (14-15)

It is important to notice how Welty juxtaposes and even equates the distorted vision of McKelva with a cosmic situation of invisibility and dislocation. It is as if

Welty wants to suggest that the whole masculine specular system represented by McKelva has become dysfunctional. Therefore, one can easily speculate that the loss of sight is encoded symbolically; it is not only a physical distortion but a cultural one as well.

In spite of the fact that McKelva's case gradually deteriorates, he never asks about his eye. Instead, he becomes obsessed with the movement of time: "What occupied his full mind was time passing, he was concentrating" (19). Certainly, he has been reflecting upon the past in terms of self- perception and the way he has treated others, mainly his wife Becky. We understand that when the latter was under the pangs of death, McKelva had been helplessly 'optimistic'. At this moment, Laurel, according to Gygax, can do nothing for her father:

It is indeed 'Father's time' that characterizes McKelva's relationship to his surroundings, including his daughter. Laurel is susceptible to her father's preoccupation with time. [. . .] She seems to accept her father's pace, recognizing that she cannot influence or alter his concept of time. [. . .], because her father during the long time of her mother's illness tried to make his wife believe that she might get well soon. (100)

However, the great irony of the book is that, when McKelva's eye starts to clear, he passes away. Again Welty seems to suggest that even though an eye problem seems to be within the ability of Dr. Courtland to cure, it surprisingly and mysteriously causes McKelva to die. In this sense, Welty seems to foreground vision distortion by charging it with more symbolic connotations. Accordingly, it is

important to observe that the problem of distorted vision pervades the whole novel, and in doing so Welty seems to be after a symbolic meaning. Again, Welty seems to give a universal dimension to this distorted vision by including further cases of blindness in the novel. We understand that Mr. Dalzell complains of an eye problem. Mrs. Martello, the nurse, describes the case of Mr. Dalzell: "He is blind and nearly deaf in the bargain [...] And he is going in surgery as soon as they get him all fixed up for it" (20). In his blindness and hallucination Mr. Dalzell takes Judge McKelva for his son Archie Lee. It is a humorous episode, yet it is significant because the irony of the situation undercuts any heroic assumptions about helpless McKelva.

Becky's blindness is also a case in point; even though Laurel describes her mother's case as different from that of her father, her blindness has to do with wrong perception dictated by the masculine society. Becky's blindness is also linked to the pattern of distorted images established in the novel. According to Laurel, Becky's blindness is much more serious than that of her husband: "Father was going to see [. . .] what happened was not like what happened to mother" (56). Certainly, Becky's prolonged blindness is a desperate case; Dr. Courtland operates on her many times but his efforts turn out to be unsuccessful. However, Becky shows more confidence and patience; she suffers for five long years. She proves to be more optimistic than her husband who has always claimed to be an optimist. Another image of distorted vision is Tom Farris, the blind man of Mount Salus. When Farris comes to view the coffin of Judge McKelva, he goes to the piano instead and taps the empty piano stool with his

cane. Farris' blindness seems to be unfortunate because his eyes are open, yet they are like the eyes in the blind statue: "He sat down, a large very clean man with rotund open eyes like a statue's" (79). Kim Martin Long argues that in such a society, blindness might be an advantage: "The fact that Tom Farris, the blind man, is described as 'so happy' seems to indicate the bliss connected with not seeing, with remaining in a condition of distorted vision" (239).

By foregrounding such a pattern of distorted vision, Welty hints that the specular system of this society is at fault and the only option available is the replacement of this system by a feminine apparatus which is based in the body and other senses. Welty, therefore, seems to be in the fashion of female writers who object to the oppression of the visual system which has been instituted by Western philosophy. Her attitude towards the specular system helps to shed light on the works of later feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray whose concept of the male gaze and its relationship with a specular economy intersects with that of Welty. This shows that Welty is a precursor of feminist theory. Laurel, who seems to operate as a persona for Welty, strongly opposes this system, and this opposition explains her attitude when the mourners of Mount Salus start to enumerate the heroic achievements of her father. In fact, Laurel's reaction seems to be ambivalent; she wants to defend her father, yet she is clearly in opposition to the whole masculine system through which her father is falsely viewed as a cavalier hero. When Laurel protests against the false portrayal of her father by the people of Mount Salus, Miss Tennyson blames her: "But honey, your father's a Mount Salus man. He is a McKelva. A public figure" (63). Major

Bullock also portrays McKelva through the masculine specular system of the cavalier society; he speaks of the heroic act of McKelva when he faced the White Caps and forced them to abstain from perpetrating any violent action against the court. The White Caps came to take their man from jail: "But Clint. Clint all by himself, he walked out on the front steps of that courthouse and stood there, and said come right on in! The jail is up stairs, on the second floor!" (79). Later, and according to Major Bullock, we understand that because of the heroic act of McKelva, these people were repulsed and forced to return to their holes like "rats". In addition to this heroic profile of McKelva, there are other signs indicative of his chivalric nature; his collection of books such as The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Tennyson's poetical works, and Dickens, along with the telescope, reinforce McKelva's masculine image established by the people of Mount Salus.

What is surprising, however, is that women in this society are caught up in this system, but each is trying to adopt or resist it in her own way. Becky herself is a victim of this system. Even in her sickness, she insists on using make up and wearing the best clothes. Laurel recalls her mother, "before the inadequate mirror had powdered and dabbed rouge on her face and put a touch of lipstick and even sprayed about with her scent, as though she had been going to an evening party with her husband" (145) . Of course the inadequate mirror is a sign of Welty's rejection of women's perception of the self. Fay is also caught up in this system; even though she is not very young, she insists on having her hair twisted like a child. The pink color that pervades the room is an attempt on her

part to make herself as attractive as possible. Her room reflects her desire; Fay wants to be a source of sexual temptation. The pink color which is usually associated with sexuality is all over the room: "It seemed to swim in a bath of pink light... peach satin smothered the windows all around" (60). It should be admitted, however, that Fay's sexual tactics are in defiance to this culture. Fay seems to possess a kind of sensuality and sexuality that are not in the other characters. Harrison confirms that: "Fay's pink – satin bed serves as a garish reminder of her sexual nature, a transgression of the traditional restraint in the McKelva home" (121). Fay wants all the time to be the perpetually pretty girl in the eyes of her elderly husband, Judge McKelva. In fact, Welty's dissatisfaction with this culture is made clear when she zooms in on the picture of the beautiful girl on the candy box which is left after the funeral is over: "Beside it lay a candy box with the little picture of a pretty girl on the dusty lid" (100). Certainly, this picture represents the standards of beauty as they are visualized by the masculine specular system of society. Welty, in The Optimist's Daughter, strongly rejects this system. Her rejection is encoded in the telescope of Judge McKelva; it is a telescope which seems to be anachronistic as observed by Laurel: "Along the cabinet top his telescope was popped extended like a small brass cannon" (119). Welty also uses the telescope image in The Golden Apples. Commenting on the masculine ramifications of Loch's telescope, Rebecca Mark confirms: "The telescope indicates an attempt to force things together that do not want to go" (53). It is a clear reference to the oppressive nature of the telescopic view.

After foregrounding these patterns of distorted vision, sexuality, and the masculine standards of beauty, Welty deliberately replaces them with new patterns of sensual perception. The dislocated vision is replaced by other senses, and the sexual images give way to other parts of the body such as hands, fingers, and arms, and above all, to the act of memory, which has been discussed earlier. It is remarkable that, in most cases, the activated senses and the other parts of the body are associated with women. When Laurel leaves her room at the Hibiscus Hotel, she does not know about the proceedings of the carnival by seeing but rather by hearing: “but when she let down the window glass, she heard the same mocking trumpet playing with a band from the same distance away. Then, she heard more than one band, heard rival bands playing up distant streets” (30-31). The repetition of the verb “heard” in the extract above is a kind of syntactic and semantic foregrounding; it draws attention to the power of hearing compared to the dysfunctional vision. It is also important to observe how Laurel’s internal vision, the eye of imagination and creativity, starts to emerge. Price describes this newly emergent vision as a very powerful means of perception: “Only in the ride through revelers towards the hotel does Laurel begin to see, with a new and steelier vision, meanings hung round people, what does not yet speak” (81). Although Laurel has been to the hospital many times, she has never paid attention to the symmetry of the tiles, but now she sees the design of the tiles: “Like some clue she would need to follow to get to the right place” (31). It is clear that Laurel is guided by the power of her intuitive vision rather than the power of her eyes.

Again, what is surprising is the fact that it is not only the senses that are activated but the other parts of the body as well. In this respect, it is important to observe how Mrs. Martello, the nurse, behaves when Fay screams and tries to pull her husband out of bed; Mrs. Martello becomes angry: "She swung her starched body and sent her voice toward Judge McKelva's door" (33). When Laurel hears the screaming of Fay, she comes running, but it is interesting to notice how Welty foregrounds this movement typographically: "At last her legs drove her. Laurel ran" (33). When Laurel is at her father's bed, "she reached to put her hand into his open hand and press it gently" (33). Hands become an active means of communication between Laurel and her father. Later when Judge McKelva dies and Laurel takes his body back home, we see at Mount Salus the bridesmaids embracing Laurel one by one and then Trish's arm is "linked to Laurel's" (49). By this arm linking, it seems that Welty wants to suggest that sisterhood is needed in such situations. When Laurel goes into her room and her hands reach a book, she keeps holding it. It is then, she immerses in an act of remembering; she remembers her parents reading to each other in their room. Again, after the funeral is over, we see Miss Adele lifting her empty hands and dropping them when Laurel "touched her own to one of hers and watched her go" (102). There is another interesting scene in which Laurel's senses are clearly on alert; it is the scene when Laurel escapes from the trapped bird and goes to her parents' room, now Fay's. It is a stormy night and Laurel's senses are intensively evoked by the sound of the wind and rain: "she listened to the wind, the rain, the blundering frantic bird, and wanted to cry out as the nurse

cried to her 'Abuse! Abuse!'" (130). It is important to remark that this scene comes immediately before the prolonged act of remembering in which Laurel watched her mother sewing in the little room . This act leads her to the greatest discovery about the real relationship between her father and mother. What is interesting, here, is the fact that memory is triggered by senses, not by vision. Moreover, when Laurel goes through the letters sent by her father to her mother, she holds a solid object; it is the river stone with her father's initials on it. It is the same stone her father gave her mother when courting her "up home". Laurel's perception of things is channeled by her fingers: "her fingers remembering it before she held it under her eyes" (135). Another scene in which the organs of the body, mainly hands, are involved is when Laurel's hands hold onto the hands of her parents. However, this image of love and harmony is succeeded by many images of suffering and betrayal. Laurel's grief, then, is conveyed to us through senses and feelings. Accordingly, by this shift from vision to sensual experience, Welty gives a sort of credibility to women's senses and feelings in order to reach the truth which has been demystified by the masculine system; it is a new strategy to reach the bottom of truth.

Besides the sensual effect of hands, Welty uses them for other symbolic purposes. At the beginning of the novel, Judge McKelva puts his hands in the hands of the doctor. Later, after the operation, his hands become idle and his daughter feeds him as if he were a child. The idleness of his hands and his helplessness are associated with the idleness of the clock hands. Accordingly, this intertwined symbol stands for the castration of the father; he can not move

his hands; moreover, he is displaced in time. This physical and spiritual castration is followed by the emergence of the mother- daughter relationship through the act of remembering. Gyax ascribes the emergence of this relationship to the power of memory: “ The power of his daughter’s memory with respect to his life is restricted, whereas it evokes life when concerned with the mother” (105). There is another significant image when, this time, Laurel holds the hands of her parents: “ She sat and thought of only one thing, of her mother holding and holding onto their hands, her own and her father’s holding onto her mother’s long after nothing was said” (150). This image seems to be a clear symbol of the pledge of love and family integrity; it is a pledge that McKelva discards when he decides to marry Fay without considering the suffering and pain of his sick wife. It is unfortunate that Becky’s hands, that were often used to sew the best clothes and bake the finest bread, are left to bleed and extend the angry accusation against the indifferent husband and the unhelpful daughter. Retrospectively, we see Becky’s hands actively sewing, and Laurel’s piecing together “the fallen scraps of cloth into stars, flowers, birds, people or whatever she likes to call them” (133). It is an exquisite image of a mother and her little daughter with their hands involved in an act of creativity. Laurel’s gift of hands is a matriarchal inheritance; these hands make her a famous fabric designer and in effect, an independent woman.

It is also interesting to observe how Welty variates on the symbolic use of hands. When Laurel refers to her husband as a man of perfection, she refers to his hands: “Phillip had large, good hands and extraordinary thumbs- double-

jointed where they left the palms, nearly at right angles, their long blunt tips curved strongly back. When she watched his right hand go about its work, it looked to her like the Hand of his name" (161). Later, we understand that Laurel learns how to be creative herself by working side by side with Phil drawing 'patterns and sketches'. It is an implication that women's hands are not only fit for domestic chores such as sewing, baking, and gardening but for creativity as well. In her article, "The Freed Hands", Kim Martin Long stresses the significance of hands in The Optimist's Daughter: "Hands themselves work significantly into the pattern of the novel as they relate to the idea of manipulating a structure or maintaining control" (237). All the references to hands draw our attention to the fact that hands are a symbol of free will, creativity and designing things. By our hands we can make sense of our life. An explicit and significant indication of the free choice made by hands is Laurel's grandmother's statement when she discusses the feeding of pigeons: "It would eat from her hand, if she would let it" (154). The free choice conveyed by this statement is, in fact, a turning point in Laurel's pursuit of patterns in life, patterns that are under control. Laurel realizes that these patterns, that are created by her own freed hands and preserved in her memory, are the only things that outlive death. It is not strange, then, when Welty assigns much importance to hands and associates them with memory. Nor is it a surprise when Laurel connects memory with hands and thinks of them as the only way by which she can overcome the solid past: "Memory lived not in initial possessions but in the freed hands, pardoned and freed, and in the heart that empties but fills again, in the patterns restored by

dreams” (179). Welty believes that the hands of women are an indication of creativity and perfection. These hands, however, do not work in isolation of the heart; on the contrary, they are instruments of the heart.

In fact, Welty’s interest in the woman artist has grown up with her since childhood. In One Writer’s Beginnings, Welty reveals her admiration of Fanny, an old woman who keeps telling stories without stopping sewing. Welty observes the woman sewing and telling stories simultaneously: “Her hands steadied me like claws as she stumped her knees around me, [. . .] I dare say she was an author” (14). This image of the woman artist, as argued by Harrison, becomes an important concern in Welty’s fiction. She agrees with Michael Kreyling that, besides the issues of faith and distance in human relationships, the two texts “share as well a concern with the woman artist [. . .] questions about the tension, choices, and triumphs that await a woman artist” (109-10). Laurel works as a professional designer; she is an artist whose hands secure for her economic and social independence. Welty realizes that the freedom of women can be achieved through their hands, the instruments of artistic creativity. Therefore, the hands of Laurel Hand, like the hands of Phil, are key elements to her artistic designs, designs that will sustain the patterns of her life. Harrison argues that Welty’s vision of the woman artist has gradually evoked in her fiction:

This exploration begins in *The Robber Bridegroom* with the lies and plots of Rosamond and Salome, and it continues with Laura McRaven’s drawings in *Delta Wedding* and the oral storytelling of the Renfro-

Beecham women in *Losing Battles*. In *The Optimist's Daughter*, questions about artistry and art, about art as a process of living in relation to others, and about the tensions, choices, and triumphs that await a woman artist—questions that are implicit in her earlier works—are explored in Laurel McKelva Hands coming to term with memory and the past. (110)

Women's hands and her talent for creativity are symbols for freedom and self-reliance. Laurel is able to make sense only by the freed hands and the heart which is the source of inspiration.

Other central symbols and images in *The Optimist's Daughter* are those of birds. Such images and symbols are introduced to suggest meanings that have to do almost exclusively with women's experience. The pigeons of Laurel's grandmother, the cardinals of Becky's reflectors, the chimney swift trapped in Laurel's room and birds hovering over Judge McKelva's grave or over the confluence, are all significant symbols which may not be fully deciphered outside their feminine context. Usually, birds stand for unrestrained freedom; they fly from one bush to another, twittering their madrigals. These beautiful songs have inspired many poets throughout history. John Keats and Percy Shelly, two English Romantic poets, sing of birds and celebrate their freedom. Keats aspires to be associated with the nightingale in order to forget his ennui on earth. Alfred Tennyson also gives a lovely description of the eagle soaring in the sky and falling to the ground like a 'thunderbolt'. Pigeons and doves are also universal symbols of love and peace. The mockingbirds, in turn, are known for their exquisite imitation of the tunes of other birds. Welty, however, does not stick to

the traditional emblematic meanings of birds but rather manipulates them to generate new meanings relevant to women's experience.

The pigeons of Laurel's grandmother in West Virginia evoke in Laurel peculiar feelings of horror. When she observes the pigeons gag each other, she feels disgusted and wishes that they would not do it again. In fact, a keen observer of the world of pigeons^v may end up with the following observations about their behavior. First, pigeons have an exquisite habit of courting each other; they usually fall in love with each other in a romantic manner. Second, they provide a good example of performing joint domestic responsibilities; the male and the female interchangeably build the nest straw by straw. The male usually delivers straws to the female who in turn arranges them in a convenient shape inside the hole. Third, the female pigeon lies on the eggs for a longer time than the male. When the eggs hatch, the male has a larger responsibility in feeding the young pigeons than the female. Last, the romantic relationship which combines the couple is vulnerable; possible betrayals are often initiated by the male who is much more outgoing than the female. Surprisingly, in The Optimist's Daughter, we understand that Laurel has been a keen observer of her grandmother's pigeons; she is often taken by Becky to visit her grandmother in West Virginia. When she is there, Laurel spends much time watching the pigeons. Even though she is 'panic stricken' by their behavior, she does not go away: "But Laurel had kept the pigeons under eye in their pigeon house and had already seen a pair of them sticking their beaks down each other's throats, gagging each other, eating of each other's craws, swallowing down all over again

what had been swallowed before" (140). Certainly, Laurel is appalled by this sense of utter dependence and inescapability in such a relationship; it is a relationship which, she suspects, might not hold in the relationship among human beings. Gygas comments on this scene: "the description is considered to be a key passage by some critics because it affects human needs and the difficulty in being dependent on each other" (113). Laurel retains this scene in her mind for future verification. Finally, when the scene is brought back by her memory and she relates it to her parents' relationship, she is overcome by excessive sadness. In discussing the ramifications of this symbol, Louise Westling explains Laurel's sadness by saying:

She now confronts the pain of loss when this reciprocal dependency is dissolved by death. [. . .] When Becky herself came to die, she began bitterly accusing her husband of not being able to sustain her. The pigeons might have taken turns protecting and protesting each other, but against the onslaught of death their human analogues were helpless.

(160-61)

It is clear that Laurel is highly embittered by the unfortunate fate of her mother. She is even disappointed that her mother did not have enough knowledge about the true relationship among mortals until she got sick and faced the grim reality. She is left to suffer alone and her dearest ones turn their backs. Laurel realizes that her mother was denied even the most disgusting habit of the pigeons when they take turns in protecting each other.

However, this sense of dependence and protection does not appeal to Laurel who insists on being an independent woman. To pursue this independence, Laurel leaves home and goes to Chicago in order to work as a fabric designer. In this sense, Laurel cherishes her relationship with the deceased Phil; it is Phil who had taught her that protection and interdependence are foolish and crippling things that we retain from childhood: "He had showed her that this need not be so. Protection, like self protection, fell away from her like all one garment, some anachronism foolishly saved from childhood" (161). Welty here seems to be alluding to her personal life and more specifically to her own childhood. Even though Welty inherited the sense of interdependence from her mother, she usually fought her mother's desire to provide her with protection. In One Writer's Beginnings, Welty portrays this tension between interdependence and independence:

Indeed it was my chief inheritance from my mother, who was braver. Yet, while she knew that independent spirit so well, it was what she agonizingly tried to protect me from, in effect to warn me against. It was what we shared, it made the strongest bond between us and the strongest tension. (60)

This same tension between interdependence and independence causes Laurel much grief. It is true that the sense of intimacy connoted by the pigeons is distasteful. However, her realization that neither she nor her father has been capable of helping her mother in her ordeal makes her sad. Fortunately, this tension is finally resolved when Laurel finds her grandmother's letter sent to her

mother; in this letter, there is a reference to pigeons when Laurel's grandmother sends her one pigeon for her birthday and recommends that: "it would eat, if she would let it" (154). Laurel then recognizes that she could have helped her mother if she had wanted to. Unfortunately, this discovery is too late, yet it is essential for the future. Marilyn Arnold comments on Laurel's discovery:

Laurel's grandmother has given her the key for unlocking her garrisoned heart. In idealizing the relationship of those she loved, in seeking to protect the dead from the scrutiny of memory and in arming herself against those born like Fay, [. . .] Laurel had denied her loved ones and herself access to memory's freeing powers, the powers that prompt forgiveness and love in the promise of continued renewal and blessing.
(244)

It is then, by this free will, Laurel can free herself from the burden of the past and fight the atrocities of the present in order to have security in the future.

Another interesting and vague symbol is the swift which causes Laurel much disconcertion. There is much speculation about the symbolic overtones of this bird trapped in the house. Cited in Champion, Cleanth Brooks wonders about the significance of this symbol:

Does the bird merely represent the vague terrors of the night that beset Laurel? Or does the sooty bird [. . .] betoken the alien presence of Wanda Fay in the house, troubling its old inhabitants, putting a smudge on everything? Or is the bird, so eager to get out of this strange labyrinth into

which it has fallen, Laurel herself trapped in the past that has suddenly become to her strange and polemical? (230)

As a formalist critic, Brook believes that all these suggestions might apply, and Welty deliberately does not overtly hint at any of these possible interpretations. It is true that the bird trapped in the house arouses some feelings of horror and makes Laurel restless; however, any interpretation of this symbol will not be of a value if women's attitudes towards birds are not taken into consideration.

Culturally and according to superstitions, a trapped bird in the house is a sign of current or impending evil. If so, there is no worse evil than Laurel's discovery of her father's betrayal of her mother or Laurel's incapability to help her mother in her ordeal. Laurel's fear and disgust can also be interpreted in a way which has to do with the attitude of women towards trapped birds. Indeed, the bird, as a bird, does not scare Laurel; she is terrified by its helpless condition in its captivity.

When Mr. Cheek offers Laurel to get it out of her room, she says: "it will get in every room in the house if you let it" (165). Yet, Mr. Cheek tells her: "It aint trying to get in. Trying to get out" (165). Clearly, the bird is confused so it goes from one room to another; it tries to find a way out and be free. Finally, when Missouri gets the bird, Laurel says: "Why won't it just fly free of its own accord?" (167).

Then she opens the screen door and runs down the stairs with two straw wastebaskets in order to set it free (168). Laurel could have asked Mr. Cheek or Missouri to take the bird away and not to show it to her, but we find Laurel persistent in her wish to release the bird herself. In fact, the image of the bird trapped in the house is as disconcerting as the image of her mother when she is

incarcerated in the house during and even before her sickness. This bird is perhaps meant to represent the image of women doomed to be prisoners of the house. It is an image which Laurel never comes to terms with because it is a reminder of the patriarchal assumption of women being the angels of the house. When asked by Martha Noppen about this bird, Welty replies: "It is terrifying to think of anything with wings that can't get out- the caging of anything, a spirit. I have a terrible panic in a crisis when a bird gets in this house" (26). Certainly, this image is scathing to Laurel because she knows that, within the masculine society, the house is a prison which restrains and incapacitates women as it does her mother Becky and the other women in Mount Salus. Therefore, it is not a surprise when we see Laurel take the bird herself and set it free: "I'll make it free" (167).

Arnold offers another symbolic interpretation of this bird. She argues that the past is trapped in Laurel's mind like the bird in the house: "The past is caught in Laurel's inflexible idea of it just as the bird is caught in the house" (240). Arnold, however, continues to equate this chimney swift trapped in the house and the past trapped inside Laurel without situating her interpretation in its feminist context. Definitely, Laurel starts to acquire an idiosyncratic perception of the past; she has a new vision which fits with her experience as a woman who refuses the claims of the patriarchal society. Arnold mentions that when Laurel flees to her parents' room and particularly to her mother's little sewing room, she feels safe. Clearly and as it was illustrated earlier, this past which pursues her like the trapped bird represents the oppressive restraints under which women

suffer. After reflecting on her mother's experience with her father, Laurel comes to realize that the past stands for the false heroic values stipulated by the masculine system of the cavalier South. Laurel sees her mother as a victim of this society. Therefore, Laurel's admiration of her mother seems to go beyond the matriarchal kinship; she admires her because she never surrendered to the claims of the masculine society. Becky's efforts to protect her own space and privacy from the outside threats are indeed efforts that represent women's resistance against the oppressive nature of that society. In this respect, Harrison argues: "the conflict between the masculine and the feminine perspectives is dramatized over Becky's illness. Whereas the Judge seeks to ignore her suffering, Becky reduces the memory of her life and her husband's and daughter's lives to pain and betrayal" (135). Becky's sewing is definitely a part of her effort to maintain her independent identity through creativity. This is perhaps why Laurel feels safe when she goes into her mother's sewing room. Laurel is certainly appeased by her mother's efforts to resist the rigid claims of the masculine past. Thus, it is not strange to see Laurel relieved when the bird is released.

The cardinals that come to eat the figs with bold appetite are also symbolic. It is understood that Becky attempted to keep away the cardinals from the fig tree by installing reflectors. However, and in spite of her relentless efforts to keep these cardinals away, they succeed in reaching the tree. This symbol is intricate, and it can not be interpreted in isolation of the biblical connotation of the fig tree which is associated with women's sexuality. In interpreting this symbol,

Arnold suggests that cardinals stand for the external incursions which are difficult to stop. She argues that, symbolically, the cardinals stand for the town's people who: "invent an heroic past for Judge McKelva while he lies helpless in his coffin" (239). Laurel, according to Arnold, tries to provide protection but her efforts are futile. To some extent, such an interpretation gives an insight into the intricacy of the symbol; yet, it falls short simply because it does not take into consideration the biblical connotations of the fig tree. In fact, Becky installs the reflectors in order to dissuade the cardinals from approaching the tree. This is a clear reference to the biblical image of Adam and Eve covering their nakedness by the leaves of the fig tree. However, the fig tree is cursed because, according to the biblical parable, it refuses to take part in anointing the King. The fig tree, according to Han's Biedermann's Dictionary of Symbolism has erotic connotations: it is an attribute of "the phallic god Priapus, which suggests erotic association" (128). There seems to be a kind of association between Becky and the fig tree. Becky, who has always predicted Fay, is interested in making her body and sexuality a private concern. However, Fay who, is driven by her sexuality succeeds in invading this privacy and even replaces Becky's body, using no reflectors. So there is no wonder when we hear Becky angrily saying: "that fool fig tree, will it ever learn" (153). Certainly, her cry is charged with a great deal of disappointment over her unsuccessful effort to keep her body as a matter of privacy. Becky realizes that the fig tree stands for her inhibited sexuality.

The mockingbird that appears at the beginning of chapter three is also a significant symbol. Mockingbirds, with their melodious songs and lovely tunes, are a personification of excessive pride. In addition, the mockingbird is a symbol for the Southern states. It is quite interesting to see how Welty associates this symbol with women who are driven by their pride to the extent that they fear any change. After Fay's departure, the Mount Salus women including their guest Laurel Hand congregate in the backyard of McKelva's house. We see Miss Tennyson, Mrs. Bolt, Mrs. Pease, Miss Adele and Laurel speaking about the living and the dead. All of these women seem to be caught up in the past in different ways. For these women, Fay is an outsider who has come to Mount Salus to defy their traditional ways of life; Fay is a real danger because she puts at stake their long established customs and traditions. For Laurel, however, Fay is an invader of the private territory of her parents. In either case, Fay seems to challenge the assumption of all the women in Mount Salus. It is interesting to observe how Welty overshadows such a scene by the use of the mockingbird symbol: "Cardinals, flying down from low branches of the dogwood tree, were feeding here and there at the ladies' crossed feet. At the top of the tree, a mockingbird stood over them like a sentinel" (105). Such an image shows how Fay's sexual and sensual presence is compelling; it forms a real menace to the sheltered life of those women. The cardinals which stand for Fay's sexual intrusion have already silenced the mockingbird. When the scene unfolds, all these women reveal their negative attitude towards Fay. For a second, we tend to agree with these women; however, when we interpret the symbol in its feminist

context, we start to change our minds. Miss Tennyson objects to the newly rebellious housewife model Fay represents: "Nothing but sit and eat. [. . .] And keep straight on looking like a sparrow" (106). For them, Fay is not of any value even though she makes McKelva happy. Miss Tennyson seems to be referring to Fay's sexual temptation to McKelva, and this according to her, is an act of guilt because she is marrying a man of the age of her father: "Well, if she made him happy. You've never caught me guilty yet of saying any more than that" (106). At the peak of their gossip and criticism of Fay, the mockingbird is heard singing: "On the top of the tree, the mockingbird threw out his chest and let fall a cascade of song" (108). Welty suggests here that these women are so blinded by their pride that they can only see things through their eyes and interpret them according to their traditional standards. Welty sees in Fay an element of rebellion, an element which is necessary to make these ladies renounce their excessive pride. In this episode, the song of the mockingbird is an indication of the relentless arrogance of these women. These women, like the Fairchilds in Delta Wedding, are unconscious of the changing world around them, the world of women in particular.

The Mount Salus women continue to speak with more contempt about Fay and her clan. For them, the Chisoms are uncivilized people and of ill behavior. Again, the mockingbird sings to accompany the critical notes of Miss Adele, the school teacher: "Singing over her words, the mockingbird poured out his voice without stopping" (110). However, later it becomes significant that Fay is different from these women. Miss Adele admits, in a sarcastic manner, that Fay

is much more efficient than any woman in Mount Salus because she has succeeded in changing Judge McKelva: "Fay stuck to her guns longer than the rest of us, the ones who knew Judge McKelva, and knew everything better" (110). On one hand, Miss Adele's sarcastic tone reveals her envious attitude towards a woman like Fay. On the other, it reveals her inhibited erotic desire towards McKelva. Through Laurel, we understand that Miss Adele has some feelings towards her father; she would stand for hours at her window expecting McKelva to see her. When it comes to Laurel, we see her disliking Fay only because she replaced her mother in unusual circumstances. When they ask her about Fay, Laurel replies: "I hope I never see her again" (112).

The ambivalent pride of these women and their gossiping nature make them turn against Laurel. They criticize her for marrying an outsider and leaving Mount Salus in order to work as a fabric designer in Chicago. Miss Tennyson, with much envy, reveals her attitude toward a liberated woman like Laurel: "That girl's had more now than she can say grace over. And she's going back to that life of labor when she could just as easily give it up. Clint left her a grand hunk of money" (112). Again, Miss Tennyson reveals a hidden desire to be liberated like Laurel, but her pride makes her cling to the pastoral life of the Old South. Laurel, however, does not care for the criticism of these women and decides to leave for Chicago to pursue her artistic career. In this sense, Laurel can be fairly described as the ever blooming flower of Mount Salus.

Speaking of flowers, one's attention is drawn to the pervasive presence of flowers in The Optimist's Daughter. The recurrent reference to flowers and roses

does not seem to be arbitrary. Welty seems to be drawing on the symbolic significance of these flowers. Long argues that: “ Flowers provide one of these repeating elements, not only giving the novel a nice backdrop and enhancing the description of the characters, but also providing a symbol for Laurel’s mood” (235). Taking this argument into consideration, it is important to show how some of these flowers function symbolically in the domain of women’s experience. It is universally acknowledged that flowers are associated with tender feelings such as love, friendship, compassion, grief, etc. A flower with a nice fragrance is quite often associated with the beauty of women. What is interesting however is that, in all cases, Becky is associated with these flowers. Therefore, through these images, we feel the strong presence of Becky even after her death. Yet, Welty uses these roses and flowers in a very sophisticated manner, a manner which goes beyond the simplistic association assumed above.

In fact, Laurel’s name is a name of a lovely and protective flower. We understand that Becky gave her this name after the laurel flower of West Virginia. Fay, who fails to understand the relation between Laurel and her mother, asks disdainfully: “What on earth made Becky give you a name like that?”(27). Laurel answers in a cherishing manner: It is the state flower of West Virginia ...where my mother came from” (27). The naming here is significant because it reinforces the matriarchal relationship which has been sustained in the second half of the novel. In naming her daughter after the flower of West Virginia, Becky associates Laurel with her own birthplace, thus creating a point of intersection between her and Laurel. We see and feel that Laurel is much more affiliated with

West Virginia than Mount Salus; there she has lovely memories of her childhood, of her mother, grandmother and uncles. However, Laurel's name seems to stand for other intricately symbolic meanings. According to Bobby J. Ward, the laurel flower is associated with Greek mythology and old Roman folk tales. In fact, the *laurel* flower is interchangeable with the *daphne* flower. Ward confirms that: "the word daphne is the Greek name for *laurus*, the laurel, or bay tree" (231). He also narrates an old Roman folktale in which the laurel flower is the mother, and daphne is the daughter. The relationship between the two is strained because Daphne leaves her mother and falls in love with a young man who leaves her afterwards. Laurel gets angry with Daphne and vows to deprive her of any protection: "the wreath of honor has fallen from thy brow. There is no longer any place for you here" (232). This story enriches the symbolic meaning of Laurel Hand's name. One can easily construe that the crisis between Daphne and her mother represents the crisis between Laurel and her mother when the former behaves indifferently at her mother's death bed. However, if we assume that Daphne stands figuratively for the past, Laurel has a point in rejecting Daphne because she stands for false romance and other cavalier values.

Becky's camellia is also an interesting symbol. According to John Ingram, the camellia is: "a personification of truth and justice" (78). The camellia is a lovely flower; unfortunately, it has no fragrance. The loveliness of this flower might stand for the seemingly lovely romantic relationship between Becky and McKelva; it is a relationship which is not sustained by the fragrance of real love. If we consider the other symbolic connotation of the camellia, namely truth and

justice, we find nobody more interested in truth than Laurel and justice than Becky. This will help explain Laurel's mood of excitement when she finds the camellia blooming: "I am glad the big camellia will be in bloom" (89). She is even more excited when she finds the camellia planted by her father on her mother's grave in full bloom: "now big as a pony, saddled with unplucked blooms living and dead, standing on a fading carpet of its own flowers" (90). It is a clear sign of the divine justice which deprives Fay of the selfish gains she has made at the expense of Becky. It is also an indication of the truthful nature of her mother who never violates any pledge she has made.

Becky's climber is a central symbol in the novel. A climber is a rose bush with briars. Such a rose, because of its thorns, has acquired biblical symbolic meanings. Ward mentions: "The word *rosa* is also related to rosary beads which according to church doctrine represents the crown or *rosarium* worn by the Virgin Mary" (312). In this sense Becky's climber is a means of redemption; she suffers not only for herself but for all women to come after her. Becky's climber keeps thriving even after her death. When Laurel looks at her mother's climber, she is astonished: "The climber's rose: Mermaid, solid as a thicket, on the Pease side, and Banksia in its first feathery bloom on the Courtland side, and between them width of bare fence where Becky's Climber belonged. Judge McKelva had recalled himself at Becky's Climber" (114). It is ironical that the briars of this climber make McKelva lose his sight and later die. It is as if Welty wanted to suggest that Becky is immortalized by her Climber.

The Hibiscus Hotel is named after the Hibiscus flower, but when we know that there are more than two hundred species of Hibiscus, we may ask which species the Hotel is named after? Ward gives us a clue when he describes one of these species: "Hibiscus mutabilis is known as the confederate rose in Southern states" (189). It is then we understand that Welty seems to be referring to this particular flower for the meaning of mutability inherent in it. In this sense, the reference acquires a symbolic meaning which has to do with men's infidelity to women. It is a reference to Judge McKelva who does not keep his promise of love to Becky. McKelva's mutability is Becky's fear because she has always predicted the coming of Fay. When Becky complains about McKelva's indifference and unrequited love by crying: "Why did I marry a coward?" (148), we, as well as Laurel, sympathize with her and condemn McKelva for his mutability.

There is also mention of the tulips. Laurel, before leaving her dead parents' house, observes that "The last of the funeral flowers had been carried out of the parlor – the tulips that had stayed beautiful until the last petal fell" (171). In fact, tulips are usually associated with women; the red ones stand for a declaration of love and the yellow for hopeless love. Sometimes they are used as a metaphor for women's blood, which is an emblem of female creativity. In English folktales, tulips are a representation of women's defiant nature. Ward mentions the story of the farmer who ploughs down all the tulips in the garden of an old woman after her death. Instead of tulips, this farmer plants parsley. When the proxies learn about that, they get angry and uproot the farmer's

parsley, so: “nothing thrived in the garden but tulips grew on the grave of the old woman” (355). In having Laurel observe these remaining tulips, Welty must be alluding to this story, and in this sense, the remaining tulips are a symbolic indication of Becky’s defiance to the oppression of the masculine society. They are also a symbol of Becky’s dominating presence after the death of her husband.

Other important images are those of daughters comforting their sick fathers and those of women present at death bed scenes. These images are recurrent in The Optimist’s Daughter. The novel starts with Laurel Hand accompanying her sick father to the hospital. We learn that when Laurel hears of her father’s sickness, she leaves her work in Chicago and flies to New Orleans immediately. Her concern about the health of her father does not make her hesitate for a moment to encourage him to have the operation suggested by Dr. Courtland. This makes her stepmother Fay complain and protest: “Isn’t my voice going to get counted at all?” (10). Moreover, Dr. Courtland is often seen discussing the case of Judge McKelva with Laurel who, in turn, seizes every opportunity to meet with Dr. Courtland and inquire about the eye of her father. When the shift arrangement is made among Laurel, the nurse and Fay, Laurel chooses the morning shift in order to be next to her father, feed him his breakfast, and have a chance to talk to the doctor: “the trick was not to miss the lightning visits of Dr. Cortland. On lucky days, she rode up in the elevator with him” (18). When Fay reveals her discomfort with the intrusive presence of Laurel, Laurel responds assertively: “Why, I am staying for my own sake” (16).

The moment Judge McKelva's case gets worse, it is Laurel who acts emotionally but wisely; she does her best to comfort her father. When his case becomes critical, we find Laurel ignoring the previous shift arrangement and deciding to stay with her father: "Laurel felt reluctant to leave her father now in the afternoon" (25). While Judge McKelva is dying, we see Laurel running to put her hand in his. Again, unlike Fay, Laurel's sadness is controlled and she behaves in a very responsible manner. Finally, when her father dies, Laurel does not contact any one from Mount Sulus or West Virginia, but she decides to take her father's body to Mount Salus.

Becky, before her daughter, goes through the same experience. She even shows more courage and strength in coping with her father's sickness and later his death. We understand, through Laurel's act of remembering, that Becky stays with her father in the Baltimore hospital when he suffers from a ruptured appendix. In fact, compared to a McKelva's, the case of Becky's father is even worse; he would say: "if you let them tie me down, I'll die" (143). Again, when he dies, Becky does not call any one of her relatives; even though she is only fifteen, she takes the corpse of her father. All alone, Becky takes her father's corpse on a train from Baltimore to Jackson. Laurel admits that she and her mother have done their best to save their fathers, yet: "neither of us saved our fathers [...] but Becky was the brave one" (144). Ironically, these two women are guilt stricken over not being present or helpful to their mothers at their death bed. It is clear that part of Becky's anger at her own death bed is an expression of her guilt for not being present at her mother's death bed. We hear Becky crying: "I

was not there! I was not there!" (142). Laurel, in turn, is present at her mother's death bed but, unfortunately, she is as helpless as her father. She does nothing substantial to relieve the suffering of her mother; she is as much an optimist as her father. Therefore, Becky's words to Laurel: "I despair for you" (151), cause Laurel to feel guilt over her recklessness.

Another image of women taking care of and comforting men in their sickness at their death bed is the Dalzell family. Mr. Dalzell, who shares McKelva's room, has just had an operation; he is as unconscious as McKelva. The whole Dalzell family comes to the hospital, but the only members who are seriously concerned about him are his sister, the old woman, and his niece, the wizened daughter. Both of them are taking turns in comforting the dying man. It is important to notice that when Archie's turn comes to see his father, he is shown to be reluctant and in response his sister complains: "He is your Dad, the same as mine. [. . .] I am going because you skipped your turn" (37). Archie Lee, instead, tells his sister to go and tell her father that he has not got much time to stay. The wizened daughter, in an act of retrospection, recalls the death of her grandpa. We understand that the sweet old man died in her hands. The two women seem to have ample experience of relieving sick men and coping with death scenes; they keep pushing Laurel and Fay to give Judge McKelva some water to drink. They believe that water will help to cure him, or at least, he won't die needing water.

In presenting these images, Welty wants to suggest that women are always the angels of mercy for sick men. However, as it has been observed

earlier, women in The Optimist's Daughter are not of any help to their dying mothers, a thing which causes them some feeling of guilt. In focusing on daughters' guilt over their absence or reckless behavior at their mothers' death bed, Welty seems to question Sigmund Freud's Oedipal complex which indicates that the child's identity is confirmed only when he/she identifies with the father. Clearly, Welty attempts to reverse the masculine assumptions of psychoanalysts such as those of Jacques Lacan and Levis Straus who think that the Oedipus complex is: "the pivot of humanization, as a transition from natural register of life to cultural register of group exchange" (10). Welty seems to oppose such theories which assume that the child's identity is confirmed when the father reinstates the phallus as "the object of the mother's desire and no longer as the child complement to what is lacking" (10). Therefore, one can argue that daughters' feelings of guilt over their lack of help to their mothers in their ordeal is a kind of Weltian dissatisfaction with the masculine assumption embedded in psychology and even the medical profession.

In fact, Welty's representation of the medical profession is another sign of her discontentment with masculine society. If we look at the images of doctors and nurses in The Optimist's Daughter, we might reach a better understanding of Welty's attitude toward the masculinity inherent in the medical profession. There are some stereotypes about doctors and nurses. The male doctor is knowledgeable and authoritative, while the female nurse is naive and subservient. Dr. Courtland, according to Mrs. Martello, is a person who: "can move heaven and earth, just ask him" (11). There is no wonder, then, when we

see Dr. Courtland walking like a state 'ploughboy'. He is a man with formidable authority with his nurses; yet, he seems to be very courteous with his clients. Like his friend McKelva, Dr. Courtland seems to be a representative of the chivalric past; his conversation with McKelva indicates some feeling of nostalgia for that past. Dr. Courtland is proud that his sister, Miss Adele, still grows the climber she once took from Becky. In fact, it is Fay who realizes the masculine nature of Dr. Courtland. In this sense, her objection to the operation is an expression of distrust in his assumed perfection. She does not think that Dr. Courtland is essentially polite but rather pretending to be so. It is not surprising, then, when Fay complains: "And he is not so perfect, I saw him spank the nurse" (12). One might not take for granted whatever Fay says about Dr. Courtland; however, Mrs. Martello seems to heed his instructions blindly: "The nurse without stopping her crochet hook, spoke from the chair, 'Don't go near the eye hon! Don't nobody touch him or monkey with that eye of his, and don't even touch the bed he's on, or somebody'll be mighty sorry. And Dr. Courtland will skin me alive'" (15). This extract seems to be significant for several reasons. First, it confirms Fay's allegation about the authoritative nature of Dr. Courtland. Second, the slang language used by the nurse shows that, socially, she is inferior to the doctor who is eloquent and uses sophisticated language. Third, the crocheting is an indication of the artistic skill of this nurse, a skill which is subsumed by the masculine medical profession. It is a sign that if they are given a chance, women will be as efficient as the male doctor. In giving such a

stereotype of the doctor-nurse relationship, Welty reveals her anger towards the masculine assumptions of society.

A very significant and favorite image of Welty is the confluence of the two rivers, the Ohio and the Mississippi; it is a central symbol in the novel. In fact, water images and symbols, much like birds, are pervasive in Welty's works. The Yazoo River in Delta Wedding, the Lake in The Golden Apples, the flood in 'Yvette', and the Pearl River in "The Wide Net" are all associated with women. In including these images and symbols, Welty seems to respond to Western culture which associates women with water in order to suggest uncontrolled female desire. Carol Siegel illustrates how this culture has always viewed women: "On the one hand, woman is a flux, the tides, and the floods man cannot control. On the other, she stands for abstract virtues. If she is the land man conquers and the waterway he claims, she is also the figure of liberty, justice or courage on his flag" (12). In The Optimist's Daughter, Welty tries to refute such masculine claims; water is equally associated with both sexes. The cataract in Becky's eye, which is an image of the water torrent suggested by the poem "The Cataract of Lodore", is equally juxtaposed with the cataract in McKelva's eye. In this respect, Welty does not want to show that desire is exclusive to women but also men have such a desire. This female desire should be looked at as something to be controlled by man. On the contrary, when this desire is in harmony with man's desire, it will create a moment of real epiphany. An image of this harmony is when Laurel recalls a real incident in her life. When she sleeps in the chair, she has a dream of herself as a passenger on a train. The dream reminds her of her

trip with Phil while traveling from Chicago to Mount Salus in order to be married in the Presbyterian Church. While on the train, she observes the romantic scene of the confluence of waters and decodes its image as an emblem of continuous love. The narrator describes this scene in a very poetic style:

They were looking down from a great elevation and all they saw was the point of coming together, the bare trees marching in from the horizon, the rivers moving into one, and as he touched her arm she looked up with him and saw the long, ragged, pencil line of birds with the crystal of the zenith, flying in a V of their own, following the same course down. All they could see was the sky, water, birds, and confluence. (159-60)

Such clusters of images are usually associated with the beauty and desire of women. However, the image of the two rivers coming together seems to stand for the love which at once combines Laurel and Phil. The confluence is a moment of harmony in which the two rivers merge without subsuming each other. In depicting such a beautiful image, Welty balances man's and woman's desire. What is interesting about this image is the fact that the confluence of waters which still happens at Cairo stimulates Laurel's memory whereby she is able to connect the past with the present. Welty herself, in One Writer's Beginnings, comments on this scene:

Of course the greatest confluence of all is that which makes the human memory—the individual human memory. [. . .] The memory is a living thing—it too is in the transit. But during its moment, all that is

remembered joins and lives- the old and the young, the living and the dead. (104)

One can observe that memory and confluence of waters, two signs that usually lie within the realm of women, unite together to project such a symbol of permanent love which Laurel's father fails to exchange and sustain with her mother. Notwithstanding the ambivalent feelings this symbol has triggered, it remains a model for the unique love every human being should aspire to.

Finally, the breadboard Laurel leaves for Fay at the end of the novel is an intricate symbol and requires interpretation in its feminist context. This board seems to have connotations related to women's domestic and artistic experience. First, Laurel clings to this board and gets angry with Fay because she has stained it with nail polish, cigarette burns, and hammer strokes; therefore, Laurel shouts: "What have you done with my mother's breadboard?" (172). Fay responds in a very indifferent manner by questioning: "Who wants an everlasting board? It is the last thing on earth everybody needs" (172). Regardless of the offensive tone of Fay's reply, Laurel starts to think deeply about her words. She suddenly realizes that this breadboard is a sign of the limited role of women in general and her mother in particular. Laurel is reminded of her mother's devotion to her father when she baked for him the best bread. Laurel is shocked to realize that her mother's devotion to her father was met by total indifference and humiliation by her father. This feeling makes Laurel think of other excuses to condemn Fay over damaging this breadboard. She starts to think of it as a piece of beautiful art designed by her late husband Phil: "Do you know what a labor of

love is? My husband made it for my mother, so she'd have a good one. Phil had the gift, the gift of his hands. And he planed – fitted – glued-clamped...tight fitted every edge" (175). Again, Fay's answers underestimate the value and the importance of this piece of art: "I couldn't care less" (176). Laurel, in turn, keeps defending the board. However, Fay's argument about the uselessness of the board makes Laurel reconsider her attitude. For Fay, the board: is dirty as sin... and all the bread made tastes alike" (176). It is then we see Laurel change her attitude: "Laurel held the board tightly. She supported it, above her head, but for a moment it seemed to be what supported her, a raft in the waters to keep her from slipping down deep where others had gone before her" (177). Laurel becomes ambivalent about the board, and it is not until Fay makes her confess that the board stands for 'the solid past' that we see Laurel decides to leave the board for Fay: "Never mind...I can go along without it" (179).

Such a decision seems to be abrupt and incomprehensible. However, one should not forget that Laurel's memory is still in a shuttling movement; she must have remembered what once Phil thought of designing houses: "Phil had learned everything he could manage to learn and done as much as he had time for, to design houses, to stand, to last, to be lived in; but he had known they could equally well with the same devotion and tireless effort, be built of cards" (162). Laurel seems to have understood the paradox inherent in what her husband thought of the houses as an example of perfect design, yet they are as transient as the human beings inhabiting them. Montgomery comments on this particular paradox:

In such devices, we recognize an artistic wit at work [. . .] the perfect house, Phil Hand argues, is made to a proximate but not eternal end. Its reflection in proximate nature must be understood as a limit to any good that any hand makes through art. For in the light of eternity, as we used to say, any house can be understood only as a house of cards. (156)

Indeed, this discovery makes Laurel change her mind about the maker's attitude towards what he/she makes. This attitude should not shrink and become a matter of ownership but rather remain a spiritual asset to the artist. In this sense, Welty seems to resist the paternal claims to art and fiction. We do not create or write in order to own whatever we produce. We are not immortalized by the physical nature of whatever we make, but rather by its spiritual meanings and values that remain indelible in our hearts and minds.

In conclusion, one can confidently assert that Eudora Welty, in The Optimist's Daughter, has deliberately and skillfully constructed her work upon signs, symbols, and images that are relevant to the experiential realm of women. Her unique manipulation of memory is clear subversion of the masculine narrative; Laurel's unrestrained memory has the power to move beyond the linearity of time and, in effect, questions the past, reassesses the present and reflects on the future. What is important, however, is the fact that Welty's recourse to memory serves other purposes: it enables the protagonist to recover the matriarchal relationship; in addition, it leads to the emergence of the feminine point of view which becomes central to the whole narrative. The shift from vision to other senses is another significant sign which registers Welty's opposition to

the specular system in patriarchal society. In this respect, the symbolic reference to the freed hands is a means of affirming the feminine identity by artistic creativity and economic independence. Other symbols, such as flowers, birds, rivers, and the breadboard, are cleverly appropriated to encode a feminine experience. These symbols are encoded in a manner to fit with the specificity of women's experience; they are no longer associated with the romantic and dream- like values embedded in the masculine culture. Images of daughters comforting their sick fathers while being indifferent to their mothers in their ordeal are a subtle parody of certain psychoanalytical theories that subsume the roles of mothers in shaping the identity of their daughters.

Finally, one can confirm that, by using such symbols and images, Welty seems to challenge not only the assumptions of the masculine narrative but the theoretical claims of the poststructuralists, those who assume that the symbolic system of language is a prerogative of men and women's language is associated with the childish phase which is devoid of any significance. Definitely, Welty is in line with Kristeva and other feminist critics who express their wish that women writers should recover the semiotic phase which has been attached only to men's language.

Notes

^v The observations about pigeons are drawn from personal experience. Raising pigeons for nearly fifteen years has enabled me to understand their behavior. The observations are also shared by people who have raised pigeons for a longer time.

CONCLUSION

Even though Eudora Welty has repeatedly disassociated herself from women's movements and the claims of the feminist theorists, she has committed herself to a feminist agenda. Welty is a female writer whose works reflect many feminine concerns and, like other women writers, she is interested in women's issues and women's position in patriarchal societies. In almost all of her works, Welty enacts a feminine consciousness that challenges masculine assumptions about the image and role of women in society. In this sense, Welty is a writer whose works situate her in the female tradition of writing. In addition, her works do intersect with most of the issues raised by contemporary feminist theorists. Accordingly, Welty's discourse is feminine in both form and content; she has touched upon issues dealt with by other women writers; however, it should be admitted that she has developed them in an original manner, a manner that reflects an independent literary identity. Her style is also genuine in a way that reflects her own creativity. Welty has systematically adhered to certain paradigms whereby she disrupts and questions the patriarchal assumptions entrenched in masculine narrative.

Welty is a great admirer of women writers such as Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Anne Porter, and others. Like Austen, Welty has dealt with themes of womanhood such as marriage, love, courtship and the struggle of women to gain their own free voice. However, unlike Austen, Welty is not merely satisfied with raising awareness about feminine concerns; she has created

formidable female heroines who are defiant to the masculine society. In other words, Welty's female heroines are not only aware of the restrictions and oppression of the masculine society, but they do something about it; they struggle to redefine themselves and achieve their own free voice and independent identity. Welty is also an admirer of Virginia Woolf, and it is not a coincidence that, in most of her works, Welty responds to Woolf's fiction. Welty has often acknowledged Woolf as a writer who "opened the door". Therefore, it is no wonder that many of Welty's works resonate with Woolf's; she shares with Woolf many feminine themes, such as the issue of identity and the questioning of the past. In addition, Welty shares with Woolf some narrative techniques such as the fragmented point of view and repetition and recycling. It should be admitted, however, that Welty's themes have much more universal appeal and her style is much more subtle than that of Woolf; Welty's style is orchestrated in a manner that touches upon a substratum of themes related to the struggle between the feminine and the masculine.

Welty's narrative discourse is also in the tradition of southern women writers. For example, as Westling argues, Welty and other women writers such as Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor are all inheritors of the southern tradition of female writing. Again, Welty is different from these writers; her female characters never define themselves negatively. In O'Connor's fiction, for example, female heroines always want to escape their femininity; moreover, they are at odds with their mothers because the mother figure in such a masculine society is not a model to be followed. In contrast,

Welty's female heroines are defiant; they define themselves by challenging the masculine codes of the patriarchal society. For instance, Rosamond, in The Robber Bridegroom, challenges the masculine assumptions about the fairy tale heroine; she refuses to play the role of a naïve heroine who waits for the princely bridegroom to rescue her. Instead, she goes out and seeks her bridegroom. Similarly, Robbie in Delta Wedding refuses to play the role of a traditional housewife, a role which is prescribed by the masculine society of the Fairchilds. Robbie challenges the Fairchilds and finally succeeds in saving George from the grip of the Fairchilds. Also, Gloria in Losing Battles challenges the masculine society of Banner; she has shown her skill and power in separating Jack from the Renfros and the Beechams. In this sense, Welty's female heroines are similar to those of Porter; yet her heroines are never defeated as is often the case with Porter's. Welty's heroines seldom play the role of victim. Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples, Laura McRaven in Delta Wedding, Laurel Hand in The Optimist's Daughter, and Rosamond Clement in The Robber Bridegroom are all triumphant at the end.

Welty's feminine discourse also intersects with the critical assumptions of many contemporary feminist theorists. In this sense, Welty's discourse seems to have anticipated many of the issues raised by feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Julia Kristeva and others. For instance, Irigaray's appeal for women writers to undo the masculine discourse by using men's language seems to have an echo in Welty's discourse. Welty resists the claims inherent in masculine narrative; her modes of representation are in

contrast with the codes of the masculine narrative. In this respect, Welty is in defiance of the specular system which has objectified women. Her point of view is feminine and her narrative time is matrilinear. Also, Welty's works coincide with Gilbert's and Gubar's appeals for women writers to change the traditional image of woman in literature; it is the image of woman being an object for man's creativity. In Welty's fiction women refuse to be an object for man's heroism; they are not a blank page to be inscribed by the phallogentric traditions. Welty's heroines are always the authors of their own texts. Heroines such as Rosamond, Virgie, Robbie, Gloria, Laura, and others are the artists and the authors of their own stories.

Also, Welty's narrative discourse seems to intersect with Cixous's call for women to resist the masculine traditions that have silenced women. The bodily language used by Welty in her discourse is evidence that women's bodies should be inscribed in whatever they write. In most of Welty's works, women are conscious of their bodies and in most cases the body is a means of self-realization. Virgie in the Golden Apples celebrates the integrity of her body; she feels at ease with her body. Similarly, Easter's body in "Moon Lake" is a means of her resurrection. Also, in The Optimist's Daughter, Fay finds in her body a means whereby she penetrates the masculine society of Mount Salus. In The Robber Bridegroom, both Rosamond and her stepmother find in their bodies the power to resist the patriarchal society.

Concerning the idea of time, Welty's concept of time in her fiction might have anticipated much of Kristeva's argument about women's time. Welty rejects

man's historical time because it is a time of oppression and coercion of the feminine; therefore, most of Welty's female characters look forward to the future as a time when they can realize themselves. Female heroines such as Laura, Virgie, Robbie, Gloria, and Laurel aspire for the future because it is the time when they can live a free and independent life. Welty also perceives woman's time as cyclical rather than linear; woman's time is a time of continuity and eternal return. For instance, in Delta Wedding, the repeated natural patterns are of strong appeal to Ellen Fairchild because they reflect what is inside her.

In spite of all these feminine concerns in Welty's fiction, Welty has often been approached from a southern perspective. In fact, not until recently have critics started to consider her from a feminist perspective. Louis D. Rubin is the first critic who has drawn attention to Welty's feminine discourse. However, Peggy Prenshaw has seriously approached Welty's fiction from a feminine perspective. Prenshaw shows how the matriarchal world in Welty's fiction is foregrounded while the masculine world is deliberately marginalized. Other feminist critics such as Julia Demmin and Daniel Curley have focused on the mythological motifs in The Golden Apples. The most comprehensive feminist study of Welty has been conducted by Louise Westling. Westling, who has studied Welty in the light of Virginia Woolf, has demonstrated how Welty consistently subverts the masculine narrative by foregrounding the feminine point of view instead of the masculine. Another recent feminist study is that of Patricia Yaeger. The study explains how Welty appropriates man's language in order to express a feminine point of view. Carol Manning's prolonged study of Welty is

also quite interesting. Manning shows how Welty makes use of the art of storytelling and mythical allusions in order to undo the gender restraints in patriarchal society. In her study of the feminist intertextuality in Welty's The Golden Apples, Rebecca Marks argues that Welty's narrative discourse persistently refutes the masculine narrative; Welty, Marks also argues, parodies the masculine narrative which has been unable to overcome its crisis, the crisis of the fragmented narrative in which the male hero either achieves victory or dies a tragic death (23). Franzisca Gygax is another feminist critic who has seen Welty's narrative techniques as a kind of dissent from the masculine narrative. Also, Suzan Harrison conducts a comparative study in which she shows how Welty and Woolf touch upon similar issues of femininity in addition to the use of certain narrative strategies.

Many other critics and scholars have recently conducted more feminist studies of Welty's fiction; they have discussed different aspects of Welty's feminine discourse. In this respect, my study is an extension of the previous studies; however, my angle, as has been shown, is an attempt to push the previous studies into a new territory. Accordingly, the paradigms that have emerged from this study have formed a systematic framework whereby Welty's feminine discourse can be investigated via a consistent approach; it is an approach that renders new interpretations of Welty's feminine discourse. Accordingly, the emergent paradigms have shaped the discussion in the respective chapters.

The first paradigm has to do with Welty's feminine appropriation of fairy tales and classical myth. This paradigm is the basis of discussion in Chapter Two; this discussion is limited to The Robber Bridegroom and The Golden Apples. In The Robber Bridegroom, Welty appropriates the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche. Rosamond is repeatedly compared to Psyche; but unlike Psyche, Rosamond fights for her voice and identity; she does not wait for the bridegroom to come but she goes out and seeks him. In addition, Welty's version of the myth assumes a kind of harmony between the feminine and the masculine; without such a harmony, there is no chance for any rebirth process. Also in The Robber Bridegroom, Welty appropriates fairy tales such as "Rapunzel," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "The Fisherman and His Wife," "The Robber Bridegroom," and others. Again, Rosamond is never portrayed as naïve as the heroines of these tales. On the contrary, she is assertive and persistent in her pursuit of an independent identity; she is even the one who helps Jamie Harte to get rid of the confused identity and attain a fixed one. Moreover, the relationship between Rosamond and her stepmother is unlike the traditional relation depicted in such tales. The wickedness of Salome is not meant to be a kind of displacement for Rosamond. Salome's wickedness is an attempt to penetrate the masculine world.

In The Golden Apples, Welty appropriates classical myths such as Zeus, Leda and the Swan, and Perseus and Medusa. In her appropriation of these myths, Welty shows how the rising feminine power is resistant to the oppressive masculine power represented by King MacLain and his two sons. Welty shows

that if masculinity persists in suppressing femininity, the former will lose its power and significance. The assumption is that there should be a kind of balance between the two powers. Accordingly, in the absence of such balance, the oppressive power of the MacLains gradually wanes until they become increasingly ineffective. Eugene and Ran become so paranoid and confused that they can not face or control the overriding sexuality of their wives. In "Shower of Gold," Snowdie's and Mattie Will's resistance to the MacLainian oppressive power is an example of Welty's subversion of Zeus and Leda and the Swan myths. The two women's resistance is a point of departure in the rape narrative; they both refuse to play the role of victim as is the case in the masculine narrative.

In "Moon Lake," Easter's resurrection has become a turning point in the conflict between the oppressive masculine power and the emergent power of femininity. Loch's masculinity proves to be insignificant in Easter's resurrection; however, Welty does not totally dismiss masculinity in the rebirth process; Ran's presence as a witness is of importance to the resurrection of Easter. In "All the World Knows," and "Music From Spain," the MacLain twins, Ran and Eugene, are almost crippled by the Zeus power they inherit from their father. Therefore, it is not surprising to see them unable to understand their wives. In the case of Ran, he is unable to match the overriding sexuality of his wife, while Eugene does not know how to respond to his wife's criticism of him. Accordingly, in the two stories, the sense of rebirth is unlikely because there is no harmony between the feminine and the masculine power. In the final story, "The Wonderers,"

feminine power has reached a degree of maturity and integrity. Virgie, who celebrates the integrity of her body, represents the independent feminine element which is waiting for its masculine counterpart. The drops of virgin rain are merely signs of possible rebirth in Morgana.

The second paradigm concerns Welty's concept of time in Delta Wedding. As has been shown, Welty's concept of time in Delta Wedding is in resonance with Kristeva's concept of woman's time. Welty rejects historical time because its temporality is full of rupture and disconnection; in addition, it is patrilinear in the sense that it assumes male heroic codes. She considers man's historical time as a record of feminine oppression and coercion. Therefore, Welty in most of her works disrupts and distorts man's historical time. In Delta Wedding, however, Welty's approach to time is much more foregrounded than in the other works; she consistently disrupts historical time in many ways. On the narrative level, Welty uses memory, fragmented point of view and repetition and recycling as narrative techniques that render her works timeless. By using memory, Welty disrupts the linearity of the masculine narrative. Instead of having a patrilinear line, Welty stresses a matrilinear line in which daughters are connected to their mothers; it is a connection which brings self-assurance and a sense of creativity. It is through memory that Laura comes to terms with her pain and loss and discovers her own artistic skill. Similarly, Ellen Fairchild becomes connected with her mother through memory. When Ellen remembers her mother coming to attend the birth of her daughter, Shelly, she is reinitiated in the cycle of rebirth. As for the use of the fragmented point of view and repetition and recycling, Welty,

like Virginia Woolf, succeeds in decentering masculine narrative. The fragmented point of view has debunked the masculine assumptions about Dabney's wedding; the newly emergent feminine point of view has questioned those masculine assumptions about marriage and instead asserted the feminine perspective. Moreover, Welty's use of repetition and recycling has destabilized the heroic history of the Fairchilds. By repetition and recycling, the mythical saga of the Fairchilds has become insignificant.

Welty also uses other techniques to distort man's historical time. The recurrent references to pastoral conventions and feminine fertility myths have rendered the whole time of the narrative cyclical. Stressing the role of women in the regenerative process in which the Fairchilds will be reinitiated is a rewriting of the myth of Demeter and Kore. Ellen, along with her natural and surrogate daughters, is a reminder of the Demeter myth. The sense of rebirth felt at the end of the novel is evidence of the effective role of those women in reinitiating the Fairchilds into the cycle of rebirth. A final aspect of feminine time in Delta Wedding is stressed when Welty's female characters opt for the future as a time of freedom and independence. Laura, Dabney, Shelly and Robbie aspire for the future because it is only in this time that they can recognize themselves as independent individuals; therefore, they will make sure that their future life will be totally different from the obsessive past and the oppressive present.

The third paradigm concerns Welty's employment of the weaving metaphor; therefore, the focus of discussion in Chapter Four has been on Welty's subtle employment of the weaving metaphor in Losing Battles. Welty's many

references to weaving, quilting and embroidery are an indication of her intention to metaphorically use the skills inherent in such domestic arts as tactics to weave into her narrative disparate elements in order to produce a neat tapestry of social harmony. As it has been shown, Welty has skillfully associated the attitudes of people toward each other with the performance of the land. At the beginning of Losing Battles the land is at odds with people because they are antagonistic toward each other. However, when people have a chance to reconcile among themselves, the land and nature respond generously. Therefore, the subtle linking between the myth of the land and the myth of people is an example of the intricate texture of weaving in which things are interrelated in an artistic manner.

Another issue Welty deals with in Losing Battles is the relation between the individual and society. The conflict between the individual and the communal society is a central issue in the novel. The two aspects seem to be irreconcilable, but, again Welty shows her artistic skill in finding a common ground between the two. Individuals such as Julia Mortimer, Gloria, and Judge Moody are all interested in the welfare of the society. An individualist woman, such as Gloria, has empowered Jack, the mythical hero of the Renfro-Beecham clan, to succeed in his heroic quest; Gloria is the one who has guided him in his heroic pursuit to bring total reconciliation and, in effect, rebirth to Banner. Meanwhile, it is Gloria who has always prompted Jack to see himself as an individual who is responsible for the welfare of his small family.

Also, in this novel, Welty skillfully employs the weaving metaphor in connecting the idea of outsider with that of kin. Individuals, such as Julia, Gloria

and Curly, have been perceived as dangerous outsiders to the Beecham-Renfro clan, but at the end, either by accident or by plan, they are brought into the narrow circle of the family. Judge Moody and Curly Stovall, previous adversaries of the Renfros and the Beechams, have been reconciled to them, one by accident and the other by the clever plan of Jack and Gloria. Julia Mortimer, the staunchest enemy of the Beecham-Renfro clan, is finally reconciled to the family when her story becomes the main topic of the reunion and when she is buried in Banner next to the dead Beechams and Renfros.

A final element Welty has artistically woven into her narrative is the relationship between the masculine and the feminine. Welty shows that women are also capable of the heroic quest and sometimes they might reveal much more endurance than men. Julia Mortimer's heroic quest is an example of the relentless struggle of women against the dragon. Gloria describes Julia's heroic quest of fighting ignorance as the mythical slaying of the dragon by Saint George. What is interesting, however, is that Julia's heroic quest, which is seen as an isolated feminine quest, has already helped in the joint heroic quest of Gloria and Jack. Gloria, the previous student of Julia, has successfully helped Jack in his mythical journeys; she is the one who has empowered him by her common sense and good advice. The harmony between the two has triggered a new atmosphere of reconciliation in Banner, reconciliation which helps in reinitiating the whole society in the cycle of rebirth.

The fourth paradigm has to do with Welty's feminine use of symbols and images; therefore, the discussion in Chapter Five has focused on Welty's

idiosyncratic use of such symbols and images in The Optimist's Daughter.

Welty's unique use of symbols and images is a major feature of her feminine discourse. In The Optimist's Daughter, Welty has successfully encoded a feminine experience through using certain symbols and images that have to do with women's experiential domain. Her recourse to memory as a narrative technique is a symbolic act which marks a shift from the patriarchal order into a matriarchal world. Laurel's act of remembering has connected her with her dead mother Becky and, in effect, the feminine point of view has become the focal point in the whole narrative. Also, the shift from the visionary sense into the tactile senses is a symbolic act which reflects Welty's opposition to the specular system, a system which has objectified women. In this sense, the reference to the freed hands is a symbol of women's artistic creativity. Laurel Hand is an artist who uses her hands to design artistic figures; this art has enabled her to assert herself as an independent person.

In addition to these symbolic acts, Welty uses other symbols and images in order to reflect a feminine consciousness. For example, birds are used as an emblem of women's captivity; the trapped bird in Laurel's room is a frightening thing which recalls the image of the housewife being the angel of the house. The pigeons of Laurel's grandmother stand for interdependence, which some women find disgusting. Furthermore, the cardinals that come to Becky's reflectors are a symbol of disturbing intrusion. The mockingbird's song that accompanies the gossip of Mount Salus women is a reminder of the pride inherited from patriarchal traditions.

Besides the birds, Welty uses flowers and plants that have to do with women's experience. For example, Becky's climber is seen as a symbol of women's suffering in patriarchal societies. The hibiscus flower, after which the Hibiscus Hotel is named, stands for the sense of mutability inherent in chivalric societies. Becky has always lived in fear because she senses the mutable nature of Judge McKelva. Other flowers such as tulips pervade the scene; these flowers are usually associated with women's defiance of man's oppression. The laurel flower, after which Laurel Hand is named, is associated with the matriarchal relationship. Laurel's regret over not taking care of her mother is reminiscent of the myth of Daphne and Laurel; in this myth Daphne, the daughter, expresses her regret for not listening to her mother. The fig tree also has a biblical connotation which is associated with woman's sexuality. Becky's attempt to protect the fig tree from the cardinals is viewed by her as a regrettable and vain act.

The Optimist's Daughter is also full of images that appeal to women. The images of daughters comforting their fathers on their death bed are recurrent in The Optimist's Daughter. Laurel and her mother Becky are seen sitting beside their fathers in their ordeal. These daughters, however, are guilt stricken because they do not do the same for their mothers. The images that portray the relationship between doctors and nurses are also significant. Dr. Courtland stands for the oppressive masculinity inherent in the medical profession. All these images and others are encoded in Welty's feminine discourse in order to question the masculine claims of patriarchal society. Therefore, Laurel's

rejection of her mother's breadboard is a sign of her rejection of the past and its chivalric nature.

This extensive study has been fruitful; yet, it should be admitted that it has opened some gaps to be filled in by future scholars. For example, Welty's discourse has also maintained a dialogic perspective with some writers; therefore, it should be important to see how Welty parodies these writers. Also, because of space, some issues which are as important as the issues discussed have been left out. For example, Welty's dialogue with culture and politics has been ignored; therefore, I strongly recommend future scholars to focus on such a dialogue in order to have a much more comprehensive perspective of Welty's feminine discourse.

To conclude, the emergent paradigms delineated in this study have proven to be an effective approach for analyzing Welty's feminine discourse. Welty has been found to be a woman writer whose writings intersect with many other discourses, literary as well as theoretical. Even though this study is an extension of previous studies, the approach has helped to explore new territories in Welty's feminine discourse. It has been found that Welty is systematic and consistent in employing certain tactics whereby she disrupts the masculine narrative and succeeds in enacting a feminine consciousness which resists the patriarchal tradition and, instead, embraces a stance by which the relationship between the feminine and the masculine can reinstate society in the cycle of rebirth. In this sense, Welty's feminism is not radically political but subtly literary; she embraces a literary feminist stance which presupposes a reconciliatory mode

among the conflicting forces in society. Central to this reconciliation is the balanced relationship between the feminine and the masculine; it is only by this balance that society prospers. Accordingly, Welty's feminism is positively realistic. Unlike other radical feminists, Welty does not call for a split in human relations but rather a confluence which is based in love, respect, and mutual cooperation.

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